MY TWO KINGS

MRS. EVAN NEPEAN

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MY TWO KINGS

CHARLES II.

MY TWO KINGS

A Novel of the Stuart Restoration

BY

MRS. EVAN NEPEAN

"Ah, les beaux jours, j'étais si misérable!"

NEW YORK
E. P. DUTTON & COMPANY
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Copy 2

CAROLUS SECUNDUS REX

SAUNTER with me in this shady alley!
  Come from the Past where the dead are stay'd,
I will meet you with quip and sally,
  Understanding and unafraid.
Sun, and a breeze, and a flick'ring shade—
  Scent of roses, and aspens' stir—
Here, with a hand on my shoulder laid,
  Walk with your cousin, Sir!

What did you get out of life, I wonder?
  All that it offered you took, I think.
The fires die out in grey ashes under,
  And bitter the lees of that wine to drink . . .
If *I* have guarded my flame undimming,
  But ne'er have been warmed by its cheery blaze,
If still I thirst with my wine cup brimming,
  Smile at your cousin's ways!

Did the bill come in on the heels of buying?
  The world says naught of the price you paid,
Was all you had worth the scorn undying
  That History heaps on the bargain made?
So, for sins confest as sins unshriven,
  Done in the dark or against the day,
For love that is bought, as love that is given,
  —We pay for them, Sir, we pay!

Oh, you that they swore loved naught but pleasure,
  (Did they pause to say so, between their cheers?)
Oh, you that squandered your people's treasure,
  You kept their love and you had their tears,
You held your throne all those troubled years,
  Ah, Sir, 'tis something to hold a throne!
Through the days of waiting, the nights of fears,
  Come to your own, your own.

You had your day in the Stuart fashion,
  I, too, Your Majesty, had my day;
I, Stuart with you, staged wit and passion,
  I, Stuart with you, sat out the play.
But now that your mask aside I lay,
  Revealing the man that I used to know,
You smile and you shrug with a "Have your way!
  'Tis all very long ago."

. . . . .

Dark curls on a velvet coat, a twinkle
  Of eyes as dark in a shadow set,
A ribbon's flutter—a jewelled tinkle—
  A gleam of gems in the gold-work's fret—
White lawn o'er a long brown hand, that ever
  Lies light on my arm—and so, for me,
There's a-many to walk and talk, but never
  The peer of Your Majesty!

In the dusk of this garden alley,
  Here, where the trembling aspens sigh,
When the moon comes up from the valley,
  And the red dies out of the sky,—
Come from the Past as the day goes by!
  Come, where the falling petals stir,
Come, we are kinsfolk, you and I,
  Talk with your cousin, Sir.

MAUD NEPEAN.

1917.

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PROLOGUE: IN WHICH MAUD NEPEAN INTRODUCES CHARLOTTE STUART

CHAPTER I

PROLOGUE: IN WHICH MAUD NEPEAN INTRODUCES CHARLOTTE STUART

THESE seventeenth-century Memoirs were written during the Great War, at a time when imagination was stimulated abnormally and circumstances led to the necessity for a safety-valve, also, as I believe, when the memory of my life at Charles II's Court began to come back to me.

For a long time I had been conscious that I, or a woman resembling me, was present at Whitehall some time after the Restoration. Directly I began to put down stray scenes of my "recollections" on paper, I became all the more clearly aware that I (or she, my alter ego, Charlotte Stuart) was actually a witness of many things that occurred; but more and more certainly was I convinced that I (or she) was not in London on some occasions, notably the death of the King and the execution of his son the Duke of Monmouth. I can visualise these scenes, but I know that I reconstruct them entirely from what I have read; with others the sensation is a different one —apart from all other reasons I can simply say, "*I was there!*"

I do not attribute it to race-memory, heredity will not serve in this case, though I have legitimate Royal Stuart blood as well as my descent from King Charles II and King James II. As will be seen in these pages, apart from the very strong feeling I possess that these people were my blood relations—

and therefore this work differs in character from the usual Stuart book ("old stories tied together with string," as a witty friend puts it!)—I borrow no help from a family tree. Plus Royaliste que le Roi, an abiding loyalty was the motive force behind all Madame Stuart's actions remembered (or invented); so vivid is the sensation that I may be pardoned for likening it to the wearing thin of a veil between those times and these.

Also, loving both the King and his worshipped son Monmouth as Charlotte Stuart did, I have made it clear that her eyes were never entirely blind to their faults; but I have the impression that, *for once*, there was an onlooker in the palace itself, though perhaps over-feminine in her estimates, who saw and understood much that mystified historians, and can now write frankly of what came under her immediate notice.

For it should be remembered that, among the contemporary memoirs most important in History's eyes, Samuel Pepys wrote from the outside of the Court circle socially; John Evelyn (whose diary has only been given to the public in a sadly restricted form) from the point of view of an uncourtier-like and unsociable philosopher; Thomas Bruce Lord Ailesbury, trusting entirely to memory and writing fifty years after; and Anthony Hamilton, for the Comte de Gramont, from a prejudiced point of view, and one wholly unreliable as to dates! while Mme. d'Aulnoy's description of her visit to London in 1675 is not absolutely authentic, though, if regarded as such, it is of great value, but it covers very little ground and is simply Court gossip. Bishop Burnet was never to be trusted where a Stuart was concerned!—even that valuable document known as the Buccleuch MS. account of Monmouth's last days is full of proved errors, if trivial ones. All the rest are rid-

dled with mistakes, written though they were at first hand, therefore Madame Stuart's many slips must be forgiven!

I wish particularly to emphasise this, and the fact that *the dialogue has been tuned to a more modern key*, to avoid the irritation caused the general reader by what I may describe as "the Pepys manner," and, as is only natural, the very free speech and behaviour of the times have been somewhat toned down. Much of what I write here owes nothing to History; for instance, nearly all contemporary works on Monmouth were either suppressed after his disgrace, purposely falsified, or compiled by those in ignorance of facts, or with an eye on possible favours to come at the hands of James II or William III.

The Duchess of Monmouth's letters of that date were burnt at The Wemyss in 1700, though we have a large quantity of those written later, of far less public interest, alas! The preserved correspondence of King Charles, to my present knowledge, contains not one single love-letter (I cannot call a hasty note to the Duchess of Portsmouth by that name) nor is there extant one solitary specimen of Monmouth's amatory correspondence in any direction; though the Record Office possesses a number of his letters when Captain-General, written in connection with the army we *now* know he loved so well and did his best to serve faithfully, a fact History never even mentions!

Lady Wentworth, Monmouth's true love, left not a word known to be written by her; only one spoken sentence is recorded; and no portrait exists of which the identity is unquestioned; indeed, it seems almost impossible that any of the four—two paintings and two prints—can really represent her (though I publish the best), as the dates are so hopelessly "out."

I have gone most carefully into this matter, and

have consulted various experts, as also where Monmouth's portraits, authentic and dubious, are concerned.

To my supreme regret, Madame Stuart certainly did not go to Court *before* 1670. Her memories might then have included the greatest feminine enchantress among the Royal Stuarts, 'Madame,' Henriette d'Angleterre, "so-called because she was so much more of France," who came to England in that year, and died a few weeks after her return. Had I been inventing a Stuart autobiography I should have undoubtedly made myself, or my prototype, younger, gayer, a beauty of Whitehall if not in the lively Gramont and Pepys sixties, yet certainly before Charles had reigned a decade. I should most surely not have placed my own début in the middle seventies, at a time when History, contemporary memoirs, diaries, letters, and MSS. help very little, and one at which neither Charles nor Monmouth is so accessible in every-day life to the Stuart student as they were earlier, and later. I make a point of this, to show that 1674 was by no means the year I should have selected to begin my life at Court, had this been a fictional work!

I can give no logical reason for my recollections, and I am not psychic—never was a more impossible medium than I. But I believe that anything and everything *can* happen (and sometimes does), and that gives me a wide margin in life on which some power or powers jot down notes by no means written in the matter-of-fact Diary of Everyday.

Behind me, perchance, not all the doors were shut!

Let us omit a possible skill in mental vision, a

certain trick of making friends with those of our dead and gone whose blood runs warmest in our veins to-day —so little dead, and gone such a short distance, sometimes!—the practised glibness of the journalist, the enthusiasm of the hero-worshipper, the determination to travel in a fair past century as a relief from the miseries of the present[1]—none of these reasons (or excuses), however reasonable, suffices. This following book may prove something quite different from what I believe it will be; but, again, it may read unconvincingly; if so, it will be my fault for describing badly what I have seen.

And I am aware that I shall be told I have allowed myself too much license.

I have no authority, for example, for presenting Frances Stuart Duchess of Richmond, ten years or so after her lively youth in Pepys's and Gramont's pages, as I have done here; I can only say that this is la belle Stuart as a humbler, plainer, older Stuart cousin knew, admired, and loved her. She ran out of the end of my pen, as did Madame Stuart's account of her own self, something of a surprise to the holder of that pen! Charles II and Monmouth are much as I expected them to be; on the other hand, Lady Wentworth is not; and it never occurred to me that any sort of an understanding with Lord Rochester or the vilified Keeper of the King's Closet would have been possible to a decent woman.

But, as I began to write, so came memory back.

In this life I am far more lenient towards James II, a cruelly misunderstood man, placed in a position so difficult that nobody has made half the allowances for him that mere justice demands. On the other hand,

[1] I write this book for that reason. I can only hope that it may help those who read it, as the writing of it helped me at a time of great distress and anxiety in 1916. If it does, I shall be amply repaid.

he was his own enemy to an even greater degree than were his brother Charles and his nephew James. The former I believe (and certainly seem to have believed) to have been a far more able King and diplomatist than History allows: shrewder, harder-working, hidden from his people behind his purposely assumed mask, and even from his nearest and dearest—why, he alone knew. The Madame Stuart of that day can state this fact, though she cannot altogether explain it, but she knows that her King thought his subjects fools, while never falling into the common error of behaving as if they were!—thus he paid them the subtle compliment of effectually concealing his methods from them.

She can and does emphasise her belief (which is mine) that his love for women was of his life a thing apart, that his mistresses were of far less importance than they appeared then and appear now, that his absorption in their society and extravagance for their sake were part of the mask he assumed. In the popular fancy, Charles II is, in fine, a picturesque figure whose illicit loves add to his picturesqueness! The average reader of History, at the first mention of this King, imagines him as the lounging owner of a seraglio of extremely pretty, rather witty, hopelessly bad "fair ladies." That is the estimate of himself which, I think, the grandson of Henri IV wilfully handed down, and Clio, who seldom sees below the surface, takes him at his surface value.

I do not want to beatify Charles II. Heaven knows never was a man less of a saint!

But Fortune's hand was heavy on that fated family, and never did she help them out of the pitfalls that lay in wait for every Stuart. Had it been his luck to build his house upon a rock, to love whole-heartedly one human being who never failed him, he would have left a different record. *He loved the wrong people,*

he built upon sand. Lucy Walter, his wife for all I knew and all I know, Monmouth their son, Frances Stuart who would have none of him, Henriette his sister whom he mistakenly married into France and whom France took from him—these people he honestly loved, and each in turn failed him.

He came to his throne, not as Royal youth triumphant—as he would have done had he won Worcester fight—but after that fatal decade of exile, as the man of thirty, coarsened in fibre, hardened, disillusioned, deteriorated, true member of "the race that never wore well."

So he came to his own again, and grasped life with both hands and squeezed it dry; so he took his pleasure with such as Barbara Palmer; so he called upon Nell Gwyn, gay inconsequent Lady of Laughter, to be his plaything and distracting enfant terrible; so he made the Frenchwoman queen of the left hand.

His wife was outside the pale of his existence by reason of the gulf between their temperaments; it was neither his fault nor hers, cruelly as she suffered, soundly as he has been rated.

For the Duchess of Cleveland he had the passion of a young man rejoicing in his strength, and later, the patience of a good-natured male creature abhorrent of scenes!—also, he was proud of her beautiful children, and there is no doubt that Charlotte Lady Litchfield was a daughter worth having, while he saw in Grafton considerable fighting promise. I wonder what he would have said of Grafton's later record? I myself understand and excuse it, though History does not. He was Charles's son by Barbara!—I need say nothing further.

Of his relations with those women linked to him by blood or family ties I never had, and never shall have, anything but good to say.

His extreme patience (and humour) when dealing with that poor spoilt child his mother, Queen Henrietta Maria, from whom I saw Monmouth derive many traits unnoticed by History! his management of his wayward, arrogant sister Mary of Orange, who vowed that her love for her only child, William III, was as nothing beside her love for her brother; his justice in the matter of the first Duchess of York's marriage; the unfailing affection between him and the second Duchess, who frankly confessed that at first she loved him and detested her husband, and who, though she came to worship James II, never varied in her affection for Charles, and took to her bed, ill with grief, when he died; his enduring kindness to his daughter-in-law Anna Monmouth, with whom he always sided; and his tenderness for and interest in his natural daughters, have never received proper acknowledgment.

His attitude towards his brother James was from start to finish a miracle of cleverness.

It was too clever for James!—though I must do him the justice to say that, jealous as he always was of the King, tried beyond endurance as he was by Monmouth, he was obedient and loyal, but Heaven save us from having a brother and son like those two, as His Majesty had, to play off one against the other! Play them off he did, and kept a balance between them little short of marvellous till near the finish, but like Mary II his niece, who had to choose between husband and father, Charles had to decide between the brother he never cared for and the son he adored, and, I think, played a fairer part than she did, since after all James's star remained in the ascendant till Charles's death, and Monmouth had been in exile almost entirely abroad since the exposure of the Rye-house Plot.

King Charles kept the English crown secure for

twenty-five years and King James threw it away in four, exactly as his brother had prophesied. Monmouth could not take it from him, and had he been able to do so, would not have held it any longer—I know Monmouth, and I know that.

As for my own personal relations with the King I can say this much:

There were things I confided to him that I never told any one else, there were jokes and secrets that we shared, and foolish times of overstrain or misunderstanding which his presence alone relieved, and the knowledge that he always understood meant everything to me. I have laughed with him till I could laugh no more! Once I fell on my knees by his chair in a time of sore trouble connected with Monmouth (his trouble too), and gave way altogether, my cheek on the hand laid along the arm of his chair, his other patiently patting my shaking shoulder. Do not think I often wept to Charles. It wearies a man—I know, who better? But there were days when he wearied more of laughter than of tears, the empty wicked laughter heard so often at his Court, and above all things, he wished me (without ever saying so) to be my natural self with him. For himself he could be what he pleased, he knew.

Yet Charles showed his best side to me, therefore it is of his best side that I write.

But I have encountered him in one of the blazing Stuart rages into which he fell not more than half a dozen times in the whole course of his life; I have known him desperately ill, unsuspected by the world in general; I have seen him in the deepest despondency, when I felt how the Pit seemed like to close over his head, the earth rocked under his feet, and there was no Heaven; I have been in his company when he was drunk and survived it!—all the men got drunk in those days, and many of the women,

but Charles very seldom and the Duke of York practically never;—I have heard him swear till the room went round with me, yet I kept a calm face; I have listened to jests too broad, but never views too narrow; bitter judgments passed, but never unjust sentences; I have seen him hurt to the quick and laugh cynically above the stab; I have longed with all my heart to sympathise, and have had to sit still, hold my tongue, and keep my eyes in my lap. I knew him for a marvellous actor and an expert liar—he was a diplomatist! I myself have thought him to be imposed upon more than once, and a fool under Monmouth's beguiling, but never in all my dealings with "the best-bred man alive" did I find him anything but a gentleman.

Most of his courtiers had all his faults, not half his good heart, not a tithe of his shrewdness (he was shrewd and lightning-quick rather than clever), and they were frequently cads into the bargain. Therefore I can say when the world sneers at his use, for his own purposes, of the men and women about him, "Think, do you realise what those purposes were?" In all my summing up of Charles II's career I look behind his acts and his apparent acts—screens behind screens—for his reasons, generally invisible even to me. Yet not only did my cousin understand all that I gave him, but all that I wished to give him; he took my deeds, so few and paltry, and my will, so unboundedly great and fine. He took my loyalty, aye, my sentimental loyalty, laughing me out of countenance at the sentiment, but valuing the loyalty as pure gold. I could listen, and I did, I could hold my tongue and my temper, I could give private service, some humour, some tact, I was—little as I expected him to think so—*of his sort.* I proved myself a Stuart!

Call us a shifty race if you will; somebody has said

the Royal branch of my family were a race of artists ruling a nation of shopkeepers. That is half the truth. But if you carry away the idea that the Royal Stuarts were artists with temperaments to match, knowing nothing of business, of the bringing of their goods to market, nor of the price to be paid—or, it may be, to pay—you will form a wrong estimate altogether. It is urged that the Stuarts nearly always failed. Yes, I know of only one really successful Stuart, King Charles II! and when you read History you will wonder whether Clio is blind or mad, or whether I was.

Why then, wonder. So long as The Abbey stands, there will rest under the flagstone in Henry VII's Chapel the bones of one who, wherever he is now, can afford to smile in the intervals of that better occupation which, on his dreadful deathbed, he cheerfully hoped to be at presently.

So I say again, I understood him.

I say it over and over without apology. For without that gift I had never lived at Whitehall, and this book had not been written, nor had my King, my most dear cousin, been my comrade too. As it was, so it is. Stuarts change constantly, but in the end it will be found that no one changes fundamentally less than a Stuart. Charles II never changed to me, and he has not changed now. It is not blind love on my part; it is not the old sentimental loyalty at which he smiled; it is not the clannishness of the descendant of the Stewards of Scotland.

This is the story of a woman whose King was her friend.

The life at Whitehall as it met the eye of the

habitual courtier was in mine but the shell that contained and concealed the reality.

It affected me very little; made, in fact, hardly any impression upon me. I am told that I lived in the centre of a cesspool of vice for over ten years; I can only say that I came out of it as clean as I went in. I am not speaking of the question of feminine virtue—I was, and remained, one of the "good" women—but I wish to make it clear that my associations with scheming courtiers and frank courtesans left no mark whatever on my, perhaps, elastic character. To be served by the Keeper of the King's Cabinet, as I was, to kiss Nelly, to be hand in glove with rackety Monmouth (puzzling to some, this last, and not at all puzzling to others!) to be in the King's confidence and allotted lodgings not far from the Royal apartments, was enough to blacken any woman's reputation. Either I had none to lose, or the world was clever enough for once to see that gallantry was not my affair. I could be of more use to Charles and Monmouth as a quiet middle-aged woman of decent repute, and as such I believe I was generally considered, though I played my own little part in the life of the Court. I never went out of my way to be friends with the sinners, in whom I generally found much good, but I could put Rochester in his place for a liberty as easily as I could share Nelly's coach and company, and both thought the better of me! I am fully aware that Charles and I cannot be pardoned for the advice we gave Lady Wentworth, yet he died unrepentant of that crime, and so did Charlotte Stuart. Other times, other morals.

The world has disturbed itself terribly about Charles's lack of religion—and I can tell the world it knew as little about his beliefs as it did about his son's.

The King was a Roman Catholic at heart for many

years before he died, Monmouth was what we should now call distinctly Low Church, my faith was what it is at the present day, and need concern no one more than the differences between our separate forms of religion mutually concerned us three then. I was very sorry for Charles that he could not be satisfied with the Church of England, Monmouth's Protestantism was openly jeered at as an empty form (all the world who cares to know can be better informed now), and it was supposed to be merely the trump card he played against his uncle James of York. A great many truly good people were very unhappy about the King and his son, and the few interested in me either blamed me or disbelieved my sincerity. I could not possibly be such friends, they said, with the father on one side and the son on the other (myself disagreeing on many points with both) with any root of genuine faith. Did we not argue, and quarrel, and were we not always persuading each other to different views? I can answer for it that never did Charles or Monmouth attack me about my creed, nor I them. His Grace of York was minded to have me for a convert, and I was quite ready to hear all he had to say, and thanked him, and said I would think it over, and I did so, and met him, smiling and debonair, when next our paths crossed, shaking my head and saying I saw no reason to alter my views, much as I appreciated his Highness's arguments. That I knew them all before was not for me to tell him, surely?

His poor Highness! I think of him now and shake my head again—this time unsmiling. I never could make him like me: Monmouth's friendliness for me from the very first sowed a seed of suspicion in his uncle's mind that nothing ever uprooted. James II was my greatest failure—I may confess it! There was so much in him I admired, so much soundly

valuable, he had qualities I would have given my right hand to see possessed by Charles and Monmouth, but he inherited his mother's arrogance and his father's obstinacy (and, may I say now, the stupidity of both?); he had a long and danger-fraught waiting for his crown; he was a man of hot blood for all his cold blue eyes, and by the time he came to his throne he was under the thumb of his priests, who held him in thrall by reason of his sins of the flesh. He was far less to be excused as an immoral man, in my eyes, than the King his brother, for he had a young, lovely, and (finally) devoted wife, who, though her first children died, ultimately bore him a son and daughter who lived—alas for them. She began by liking me, Mary of Modena his little Duchess, tall, thin, long-limbed, long-faced, yet beautiful Italian child, "snow, blood, and ebony," "O Dea certe!"—a martyr Queen if ever there was one, doomed to suffer (to my mind) worse than Queen Henrietta Maria or Queen Catherine. Oh, these Queens, these Queens!—God pity them, as I know He must. It is cruel work being a King, but it was tragedy incarnate to be a Stuart Queen.

Charles, James, and Monmouth were all alike, their world was full of women—and "they were only women." They all came to see the error of their ways and all too late; I think of the warning James II wrote his little son against the temptations of the love of "fair ladies," and I sigh. He died a saint, and that means, whatsoever purgatory may be ahead of us in another world, we go through a terrible one in this. If James of York and likewise James of Monmouth performed no penance before they died, then all my beliefs are false. They suffered tortures, each in his own way, each at his own time. As for Charles, I am less sure. I was not in England for many months before his death, nor when he died.

History, so often at fault, insists on calling him The Merry Monarch. It may be therefore that he paid here as heavy a price for his pleasures as they did for theirs!

Of the men at Whitehall hardly one was worth the friendship the King bestowed on him, they all thought themselves cleverer than he, and he—he did not laugh at them even in his sleeve, he preserved a serious face, put on his mask as the Royal libertine, yawned, for all the world to see, over business, gave the town its fill of gossip over his women and the money they got out of him—and why?

I can tell you.

Charles II had a kink in him. I know that, never was a Stuart who had no kink!—but it was part of the game he played to appear godless, worthless, a forgetful friend, an impossible husband. It all went to the making of his mask. No man knew Ailesbury's "most solitary sovereign," very few women. I did not know him through and through, but I could guess then, and I can guess better now. That Charles would have been a greater King, have achieved a finer triumph for himself and England had he played the strong straight game from the very beginning, History is eager to assure us. But he was aware that he himself was neither strong nor straight! and so he played the game as best he knew. I believe that only the line he took led him along the flowery paths —in the world's eyes—of his quarter-century as King of England. I believe (I too may be wrong, for I also have my kink), remembering the temper of the English for the half-century following the Restoration, that England would have had none of him in a very few years had he laid down his mask, certainly over the vexed question of his religion. And subtract Charles—and we may be sure his brother James along with him!—what would have become of England,

any time in the sixties, for instance? Cromwell and his influence and work were as if they had never been, Monmouth was a child, William of Orange a year younger. England would have fallen, helplessly entangled into a republican net of her own devising, into the jaws of France.

Charles took the pay of France—why should Madame Stuart deny what all the world knows?—but he kept the heel of Louis from England's neck. And therefore, because of this one man, reviled, execrated, held up to the derision of hate or (still more galling) the affectionate condoning of cynical sinners, a man of whom none of us plumbed the whole mystery or learnt all the secret, England—the England which had slain his father—remained a monarchy, and Charles II went lonely on his way through life and went lonely to his unhonoured grave.

But one woman who looked on has tried to write something of it all, yet, Stuart as she is, keeping something of it all back. Never did any Stuart lay all his cards on the table. Some day it will be found that we played each his game with a method, that we gave much as we exacted much, but in the locked cells of our inmost souls we all guarded some unseen love, some vague belief, some unattainable ideal. Charles II died with his secret unpublished.

This was the man I knew! Bad, but a good friend to me. And have you ever known another instance of a good woman whose best friend was a bad man?

Partisanship apart, there is no doubt one has to do one thing or the other—love or loathe a Stuart! This woman of Stuart blood loved her own people, but saw clearly according to her ability; much was hid still, from much her virtue preserved her; she was no politician, nor was she of weight in the nation's affairs. Still, she saw . . . and I write. If I write

nothing new, then after all History knew all about everything! If I put matters on a somewhat different footing, then it is true that a door behind me has remained ajar.

This is not a novel—I can't write one. This is not a diary—I never could keep one. It is a rambling, disjointed, personal account of the life I seem to remember, the affections I feel that I experienced, the sorrows I believe that I suffered between two and three hundred years ago. It aims at no definite result, it reveals no important secrets, it points no moral. There is nothing to be said for it but that it is a labour of love—love for those who bore some people, shock others, irritate a great many, and, Puritans will tell you, are worked to death in fiction.

But this is not fiction.

MY FIRST INTERVIEW WITH KING CHARLES

CHAPTER II

MY FIRST INTERVIEW WITH KING CHARLES

The past is the past!—the dust of death lies grey on the shining eyes,
Smoke from the embers rises, circles and sinks and dies,—
But a gay ghost dances through drifting mists with gold on her tumbling hair,
And a Stuart voice rings silver, like bells on the evening air,
O form eternally lovely! O face everlasting-fair!

LA BELLE STUART.
M. N.

I HAVE chosen my title for more than one reason. The following work covers the period of my life from the time I first went to live in London in 1674 until the spring of 1686. Kinswoman and friend of King Charles II and his son, I was that, never more, and, to my extreme good fortune, never less!

This book is written as I might have written my autobiography now; these are the memoirs of my seventeenth-century self, and are about as interesting and as valuable as all memoirs of those who are not public characters, who played no visible part in History, and who, though entitled to their own opinions, are probably no better qualified to express them than their neighbours. If there is too much of Madame Stuart in these pages, why, I can but say that Madame Stuart held Mrs. Evan Nepean's pen, and I can give no further explanation of this than what will be found in the course of the ensuing volume.

Of my life before I went to Whitehall I remember nothing at all!

It has taken me some time to realise that I was a kinswoman of Frances Stuart, Duchess of Richmond, who was also a connection of the King's, her father being Dr. Stuart, the third son of Lord Blantyre. She married the fourth Duke of Richmond, likewise a relation of King Charles,[1] eloping with him from Court to do so, as all the world knows. She never had any children, and on her husband's death in 1672, the title fell into abeyance (to be revived for Louise de Querouaille's son in 1675). She never married again. This beautiful woman has always been of interest to me, with her French upbringing, her great loveliness, and her virtue, at any rate, while a girl at Whitehall, in the face of the strongest possible temptations. She was seven years younger than I, being born about 1647, and, therefore, two years Monmouth's senior. She returned to Court, having lost some of her beauty through smallpox, to be one of Queen Catherine's ladies of the Bedchamber—the Queen had been very kind to her in spite of the knowledge of Charles's devotion, but I think she trusted Frances, and for all I know (or indeed care) had reason to do so.

As far as I can piece things together and come to some sort of memory, I married another Stuart cousin, and did not change my name; I believe him to have been a soldier who left me a widow at about thirty-three in the early seventies, my impression being that I was born circa 1640, thus making me almost exactly half way in age between Charles II and his son Monmouth. I married very young, evidently, as my son was practically grown up by the time of his father's death, and had also followed his father's profession. I confess at once that the figures of my husband and son are shadowy; the

[1] He was so nearly related that the King was "his nearest collateral heir"!

former was never at Whitehall, the latter only on rare occasions. I think he was a born fighter, and was always on active service whenever possible. He was killed at Bothwell Brig, and our little property in Hertfordshire then passed entirely into my hands. It is certain that I was left very poor, and I now realise what has puzzled me previously—that my acknowledgment as a relative by the King, and his most generously assigning me a couple of rooms in the Palace, after his getting to know and taking a great fancy to me, were owing first of all to my kinship with the beautiful Duchess of Richmond. I went to her for a visit in 1674, during her retirement owing to her widowhood, and she was not seen much at Court except when on duty occasionally—Catherine's ladies often found their position almost nominal—after her husband's death.

I was no longer young, my hair was turning grey, if face and figure still retained their youthfulness. I had no illusions about my possible future or ambitions for a career of gallantry, but I was a Stuart born, bred, and educated, and my deep loyalty to the King had always led me to long for a nearer view of him, and if possible, for a post of some kind that should bring me into contact with the Court.

I was lucky, as it turned out, past all belief.

I had met the Duchess of Richmond once or twice, and was always amused (and have been so ever since) at the way in which the writers of the day considered her a fool. Highly educated she was not, but she had plenty of spirit, an immense sense of humour, tact, and an esprit, learnt, if not born with her at Louis XIV's Court, and a charm for me, as she most certainly had for Charles!—which I do not attempt to excuse. She became somewhat eccentric as she grew older, and to this day I cannot think why she never remarried—she certainly only married her

cousin to escape Charles!—possibly she never really cared for any one. But she was a *dear* to me, and I owe her a deep debt of gratitude.

I waited upon her on my coming to London; I seem to see myself first on receiving an invitation to leave my lowly lodgings and come to her in her fine town house—the vision is blurred—I think it was the Jermyn Street house, but I am uncertain.

My first clear sight of things shows a tall, finely furnished room, distinctly of the state apartment order, yet bright with masses of roses, great windows admitting a flood of sunshine, and good furniture, if old-fashioned, while carpets and hangings were certainly mellowed with time and age! She only took a small allowance from the King, and was never a wealthy woman at any period of her life. I can see myself, sitting on a low seat beside the empty fireplace—I gather therefore that this took place in the summer of 1674. Frances Richmond, tall, graceful, with exquisite hands and arms, legs and feet, a somewhat long but perfectly straight nose like an old statue, with the Stuart slenderness, the same heavy-lidded long eyes and a tilt at the corner of the upper lip that always reminded me of Charles, sat a little way apart in one of the windows. I was working, as befitted my character of poor relation, her lovely hands were idle in her lap; but busy or unemployed, we were talking merrily. She and I had one great quality in common, our love of laughter. So gay were we, and the room looking out upon the gardens at the back, that an arrival was unnoticed—that of a coach, of moderate dimensions and modest decoration, very suitable for Royalty semi-incognito!—and with no more ceremony a couple of the Duchess's lackeys threw open the double doors, and there en-

tered a very tall dark gentleman in black satins, attended only by another, already known to me, and one of Frances's many adorers, Lord Mulgrave, whom I never liked, and in this existence detest cordially!

"Ah, my King!" cried Frances, coming from the window swiftly, light as a reed in the wind. "So you come again to visit your faithful relation?" and she swept him a deep curtsey and a lesser one to Mulgrave. It is perhaps characteristic of me that I signalised my first actual meeting with Charles II by the downfall of my employment!—my work, a typical piece of Stuart period embroidery, white satin worked with silks and spangles, bullion and beads, fell, materials and all, from my lap to the floor as I rose, and drew back, on suddenly realising that it was my Sovereign who had thus casually walked in,—and indeed it is the truth that he and I met first across a floor scattered with the upset details of my industry. Frances Richmond indicated me with a gay laugh across the wreckage as: "Another cousin, Sire, Charlotte Stuart, your kinswoman and mine, and ready, I'll swear, from what she's been telling me, to prove herself your faithful servant!"

"Madame Stuart," said King Charles, "you have begun our acquaintance by building a barrier between us. Must we stand separated by all these pretty trifles, or shall John get a besom and sweep a way through for me?" I was blushing with some confusion and a certain annoyance at my clumsiness, but the idea of a few scattered silks and sequins dividing me from the King, and his suggestion that 'John,' that very fine gentleman the Earl of Mulgrave, should play housemaid for him, overcame my shyness with merriment.

"Why, Your Majesty," I retorted, "I was but laying an offering of my handiwork, albeit in a raw

state, at your feet. Just one step, Sire, and you can cross the barrier if you will!" This was some sort of impudence, but I knew in a trice the atmosphere I was in—the informal gay friendship between Stuart and Stuart, and with a sudden resolve I called the tune of our future attitude towards each other, or rather, followed Charles's easy jesting lead, and met his mood half way.

He did more!—one long stride of the fine straight silk-stockinged legs, and he was over my barrier, and for the first time in my life the big slender brown hand, half veiled with transparent lace-bordered lawn, adorned with one great ring where gleamed redly a splendid ruby, rested on mine, and was met by my lips as I sank to the floor in my lowest révérence. Country mouse as I might have been, I knew Court manners; Frances herself was an open book where the intelligent might read much in a few hours, and she stood beside us both, laughing from one to the other in her quick amused way, saying, "Oh, my child" (and I several years her senior!) "you'll find it takes more than a bit of women's work to delay His Majesty once he is bent on having his will!" and she turned to him with a great crimson rose, slipping it into the buttonhole of his long straight coat. He looked at me over her lovely bent head as she stooped to arrange it firmly.

"Madame, the Duchess says that of me, knowing that she never let me have my own way!"—with a queer little uplift of an eyebrow. All the world knew the history of that affair between them, and of her victory; all the world knew also that Mulgrave was among many others who sued in vain.

"Are you as self-willed?—*these Stuarts!*" he ejaculated suddenly, as if he had been a Cromwell at least.

"Troublesome people, Your Majesty, to the rest of

the world; good friends, I think, to each other. At least there never was a family to approach them!" I cried, with a sudden warm feeling towards all bearers of my name, above all to this kindly, witty, great gentleman, whose devoted slave I was from that moment forth, who would take the trouble to set a poor simply-attired widow at her ease, just because she was of his blood and ready to answer him back with any nonsense he chose to talk. Frances settled the rose with a little pat.

"There, Sire, now all we three black crows must try to be a little gayer. My lord," to Mulgrave, a trifle aloof, resplendent in scarlet cloth with a gorgeous gold-fringed sash and gloves, "don't you feel you've walked into a nunnery by mistake? Nay, I can't find you a rose too, I have none to match you. My cousin and I," she held out a white one to me and took another herself, "will wear the emblem of the Stuarts, His Majesty wears that of England!"

"Well, Britannia[1] should know all about it," quoth Charles with a laugh.

The Duchess was rearranging the roses, Mulgrave, his hand on his heart, pleading in the exaggerated seventeenth-century fashion with a good deal of fervour behind the fine phrasing, the King looked smilingly at them both.

"Odds my life, John, we're good friends to each other, but we *can* be troublesome people to the rest of the world. Madame—sit," he drew me down on the tapestried Elizabethan settee behind us, he with his back to the outer sunlight, looking darker than ever, but for the flash of his beautiful teeth and the glimmer of his brilliant eyes, half turning, with that strange saturnine melancholy face of his, lit with its inward, unchanging humorousness, bent upon me.

[1] Frances Stuart sat to Roettier for the first figure of Britannia on the coinage.

"Now they'll quarrel very happily for a while. You and I, mistress, will make each other's acquaintance and quarrel as happily too, eh? One of us, are you? We should have met before. Ah, I see . . . ?" with the ghost of a question in his voice, and he laid his hand for a moment on my deep black skirts, picked up a little fold of the material of my long train,[1] and let it drop again. "Now you are here with her Grace your fair cousin—fair to you?"

"Sire," I said, "the most beautiful woman I have ever seen." He nodded.

"And kind? she is not always; behold the torture of John! I at least have a rose," he smiled. "And you will come to Court with her soon, nay, not to one of the great receptions, I dare swear neither you nor she feels like dancing yet, but later, if your name is Stuart"—he glanced across the room at Frances—"I shall see you grace my ball-room with a good will."

"Ah," I answered, "I'm an old woman, Sire, and my dancing days are over."

"Oddsfish, are they so?" said Charles, and threw back his head to laugh with a gesture I was to know so well.

"If you're an old woman, Madame, then I'm Methuselah himself, but I dance, and I'll dance these many years yet, if my fair subjects are kind enough to accept me as partner. So if your dancing days are over, I can promise you this, your dancing nights shall begin!—come, you won't belie your name. We can all tread a measure—except my brother James," added His Majesty, thoughtfully taking a pinch of snuff. "Poor James, he's not so light hearted as the rest of us, or light headed, perhaps,

[1] A seventeenth-century widow wore a train almost like one worn at a modern Court.

certainly not light footed! But you shall see, some day; we've all our old age before us, you and I," and he patted my gown lightly. "Meantime, we must have you on more decorous occasions" (he rose). "My cruel lady—Ah! John, you have no luck at all—will you honour us with your presence at supper to-morrow night? I have some French music that should please you, knowing of old your taste for it. And do you bring Madame Stuart with you, Her Majesty will be glad. She"—he looked from Frances's face to mine and back again—"She will put up with another of the name, I do not doubt."

It is to be feared that I laughed quite as much at this last half-soliloquy, made in his inimitable ruminating, quizzing fashion, as did either the Duchess or Charles himself. Lord Mulgrave looked indulgently on, as if at a group of tiresome children for whom he was more or less responsible, ere he turned to the door to bid the footmen see the coach waited in readiness. The dying sun sparkled on the fallen gewgaws at my feet and the flaming crimson rose among the King's dark curls, repeating the blood-red flash of the great ruby on his finger.

"Then till to-morrow night," he said, and he put out a hand to each of us. We stooped simultaneously to kiss them, and he nodded at Frances and then at me. "Be good, my ladies."

"Why, we're always that!" she cried, laughing again.

"So you are," said Charles. "So you are. Fie upon you, you disgrace the family traditions!" and he was gone, Mulgrave bowing and wheeling after him as he passed through the door, the Duchess following them to the head of the stairs. I heard her ringing voice and her gay laugh echoing back, and Charles's deep strong bass returning quip for quip. I went down on my knees and picked up my

scattered work with a smile on my lips. I had found another friend.

Back came Frances Richmond into the big withdrawing-room, and across it with that delightful floating step of hers.

"La, my dear! now you shall see Whitehall, and as I wished you to see it, not one of those crowded noisy balls that I sometimes think the very mobile has access to, but en intime, just a few of us, and some really fine music—His Majesty takes care of that; and you shall meet my worst friends and my best enemies!" and she slipped her fingers through my arm and patted my hand as if I had been a girl she was taking into society for the first time. "I declare I'm getting rusty, I've not been summoned by the Queen since some time before she went for Bath. Well, I must polish myself—and find a gown to go in. Come upstairs and we will get my women to bring out my dresses and you shall advise me. Oh, never mind your work. Shall we send a messenger after my lord Mulgrave to come back with a broom? I wish he had been made to pick it all up, he would have hated it so. His dignity is always being outraged by His Majesty." ("Or you," I suggested.) "Or me. He can't see a joke, for all he's so clever and writes such fine verses—oh! but so dull. Give me my reprobate Rochester. You won't be shocked at Court, by the way?" She paused with me on the stairs and looked at my face with the Stuart tilt of the head, side-long out of the fine almond eyes.

"Shocked!" I cried, almost annoyed. "My dear Duchess, am I so hopelessly a nun (as you suggested to Lord Mulgrave), or a good city bourgeoise? You'll find I shall take some shocking."

"You'll get it, I'll wager," returned Frances. "We are not nuns at Whitehall."

"I understand you are not," I said drily, and we both went on mirthfully to her room.

"Nay," in answer to a question of mine, as her women threw open presses and armoires, and laid upon the great bed gown after gown, "I wear no weeds there now, 'tis over a year. The King thinks them gloomy, but I won't give in to him altogether; oh no, I never do." She smiled mischievously again. "So it had better be the purple velvet, I think," she said swiftly in French to the Parisian maids she always kept, "or the grey satin—come, show Madame Stuart, and she shall choose for me." (Madame Stuart chose the purple velvet.)

"It will be pleasure enough to see you en grande tenue," I said. "Why was I not in town when you were still Frances Stuart, and I could have seen you when you first came from France?"

"Yes, young and beautiful!" interrupted the Duchess. "Young and beautiful (no smallpox then), and silly, and a spoilt child at Court. How I used to make his Grace the Duke of Buckingham build card houses for me by the hour, to keep him out of mischief, while he thought he was going to get me into it!" She smiled still more naughtily. "Then—well, then I married and became his *niece!*"—she turned up her eyes and folded her hands—"and now I'll go to Whitehall so good and quiet and——You'd better let me wear the grey after all, and look as demure as a Quaker. No? Well, then I must be imposing and heavily gorgeous. Get out the diamonds, Hortense!"

They were produced, splendid old-fashioned jewels belonging to her husband's family, and an exquisite pearl necklace and pendant.

"Poor Charles," she said, "he gave me those, and

then, you see, I sent them back when I ran away to be married to my lord Duke, and he sent them back to me, and I—why, I did try to send them back to him again, but he would not take them." She gave a little quick laugh as if at her own thoughts. "So one can't quarrel for ever, when the past is the past, and the King is the King, and—well—here they are and they'll be all the better for an airing."

She laid them on the table beside the diamonds, telling her maid to see that the settings were polished by the morrow. In my severely plain blacks I stood by the bed looking with whole-hearted admiration—and with no ulterior motive, I vow—at the finery on it.

"Now's for *you!*" cried the Duchess, swiftly wheeling round. "No false pride, my cousin. I take you to Court and I have the pleasure of dressing you, if you'll do me the honour of wearing one of my poor old gowns? Hortense, the black and white brocade with the French lace—no, the violet flowered gauze——"

I stopped her. "Dearest Duchess, you are all too good to me, but, if it is permitted at Court, let me retain my sable plumage. I'll gladly and gratefully borrow a black gown from you if you will let me, you know I have no full dress at all, but. . . ."

She turned from her women, who were diligently searching her wardrobe. "My dear," she said, "set me down as a superstitious fool, but don't go first to Whitehall in mourning. I ask it as a favour—why, I can't tell you. I have it!" And she pointed to a press as yet unopened. "The silver and black silk," she cried triumphantly. In another moment they had spread out for me one of the most charming gowns I had ever seen, a thing of soft yet thick dull-surfaced silk, black, shot (as we should now call it) with dull silver, making a sort of dark grey that glimmered and shone as the folds moved. The flowing skirts were

caught back at the sides with embroidered knots of silver and black pearls, the long straight bodice was wrought with the same—dullest silver, tiniest pearls—a sober yet adorably graceful gown, exceedingly rich yet extremely subdued.

"Ah!" I breathed in deepest admiration. "Will you truly lend me that? I have just one jewel that I can wear, and that will be worthy of it, I hope," and I drew from under my high-fitting black bodice a splendid string of pearls such as was then in vogue, short, just encircling the base of the throat, but beautifully graduated and matched, and of wonderful lustre for all they were black, or rather, the actual colour of the gown, darkest silver grey.

"My dear soul!" exclaimed Frances, while her French maids murmured respectful surprise. "What a glorious thing! a fortune in itself, too. Its history?"

"I know not," I said, "my husband brought it me long ago, from one of his campaigns. It was given him, in Holland I think, by a grateful Dutch merchant whose hidden treasure he saved from being despoiled; he never would say much, but I believe it was the worthy reward of a brave deed."

I never knew more than just that—I only guessed. There was something behind it, some fleeting or perhaps not altogether fleeting romance, soldiers lead strange lives. Whatever the story may have been, whoever the heroine (if heroine there were), the pearls came back to England and to me, and they played their part in my life-story.

When I died, only one was left to me. The rest were in Holland once more.

. . . . .

"Come in, come in; enter, and let me see the butterfly—well, the discreet night-moth, emerging

from its chrysalis!" greeted me as I scratched at her Grace's bedroom door the following evening, and was quickly admitted by one of her under-maids. Hortense had dressed my hair, masses of rolled-curls on each side, as was then the mode, and a long lock pendent, brought over each shoulder. (I always wore two when all the world wore but one. The King once laughed and called them my two lovers; I smiled and acquiesced—he never knew that in my heart I always thought of them as his curl and Monmouth's from that time forth.) The glorious silver-woven silk flowed round me, the pearls were about my throat. I stepped warily into the room, holding my skirts laughingly but ruefully in each hand.

"You forget I'm such a little woman. I shall have to go on stilts, my dear friend!" I said to her.

"Lud!" cried Frances, turning right round in her chair before her great mirror, her beautiful hair hanging loose. "Indeed I forgot I was such a May-pole!" She was not; she was not more than five feet nine inches, but in that life I was smaller than I am now, and not more than five feet five at the outside, so that her beautiful silks swept the floor all round me. She was somewhat short-waisted for her height, so the bodice needed no alteration to speak of, but——!

"Loop the sides back, Hortense," she said, regarding me. "So draw the draperies further apart, show more of the petticoat." This was of dull silver lace and moderately short. "Now for the shoes—why, we forgot her feet!"

"Well you might," replied their owner grimly, "considering the perfection of your own. No, it's of no use lending me any of yours, I shall only split them, my superstitious cousin, and you'll be horrified at the omen. Will not my own do?" I had a good

pair of black silk stockings, and my shoes were of black velvet in the French cut, at least I had taken care of that.

"They're charming—but stay," she pulled open a drawer in her toilette table. "Stitch these on to Madame's shoes," she commanded, and a pair of long looped silver bows, centred by pearls, was produced, and I sat down on the chair next her mirror and swung stockinged feet, while one of her maids quickly sewed them on my velvet slippers, and I watched Hortense, who had been sent to me first, deftly dress her beautiful mistress's hair.

"You're good to look at," I said, with my eternal frank enjoyment of beauty in man, woman, or child. "I suppose I'm to see all the beauties to-night, but nobody will ever beat you." My cousin looked at herself in the glass, while Hortense smiled appreciatively at me over her head.

"Before I took that cursed smallpox, nobody could," remarked the Duchess dispassionately. "That I'll allow. Now I'm good-looking enough for all practical purposes!" We laughed. "And for some less practical," she added, in the sort of ruminative aside that so reminded me of the King. "As for you, chérie——"

"As for me," I answered, "I'm a good seven years your senior. I sit with my back to the light when I can, and furnish a dim corner passably." Frances broke into one of the rippling fits of giggles that had so enlivened the Court in old days.

"If you plan to go furnishing dim corners at Whitehall," she said, "I shall know what to expect. We dear good ladies sit in the middle of the room under the brightest candles and look respectably passées, while the sly ones each choose a quiet spot apart—as I used to do!—so if you're for that game, cousin, come closer," and out of a beautiful silver-gilt box

she shook several velvet patches. "One there" (she set it beneath my left eye on a level with the outer corner), "and now another" (she paused to consider) "on the right upper lip, and——"

—"And that will teach my mouth to turn up again, not down," said I, pressing the patch into place firmly, "like the King's and yours."

"It's really more like our pretty James," she replied, laughing. "You've not seen our little Monmouth yet? The prettiest of all of us, egad! Eh? We don't call him a Stuart, my dear, he's a Scott, you see." (Not much of a Scott about him, I swear!) "No Fitzroy, no Stuart, no—poor James. We call him 'cousin,' and His Highness calls him 'nephew'—when His Majesty is listening," again her mirth bubbled over, "but you shall judge. That's a nice shade of ceruse, and you've laid it on well. I like your grey locks, they'll wonder at them at Court, not a woman will be seen with a white hair, but you don't care, no? The family grizzles early, Charles was nearly white before he put on his perriwig. I wish sometimes I could see him in his own hair still—night-black, and thick—*thick*—and great heavy natural curls. And Monmouth, you should have seen him when he first came to London, he was a picture! Long ringlets to his waist, thick, too, but spun silk compared with the King's."

"His mother's?" I suggested slowly. Frances nodded her head.

"Aye, I saw her once, my friend, in Paris, when I was a chit of a girl of about ten years. Oh, long before I left the French Court. It was at the house of a lady my mother knew. I was spending the day with her daughters, and as I arrived at the door a beautiful woman, but ill—ill! I never saw death written so clearly on any one's face—came out to her chair, and she paused on the step to cough, a cruel

cough, and pressed her hand to her chest. And I was a rash, impulsive creature"—the Duchess loved to speak of her youth as an age away, and her hoyden gaiety a matter of deplored and repented-of conduct!—"I ran up to her and put my arm round her and said, 'Oh, Madame, let me help you!' and I remember she smiled and said as soon as she could speak, 'Ah, there rings the true Stuart voice, but no Stuart can help me now,' and she looked at me with great hollow eyes—sad, brown, like a spaniel's that has been beaten—and her lips smiled; but I saw a little stain of blood . . . and she stepped into her chair and went away. And when I asked the girls whom I had come to visit, 'Who was that lovely lady with the terrible cough?' they looked uncomfortable and said, 'Only one Mrs. Barlow.[1] Madame our mother befriends her, but do not say you met her, please, Fancy,' (that was my old name). And when I impetuously demanded, 'Why not?' their gouvernante bade me ask no more questions. She died soon after, I think."

"Of a decline," I suggested, slipping into my newly decorated shoes and not meeting the Duchess's eye.

"Why, yes, of a decline, but the Duke of York will contradict you if you tell him so!" This with the ghost of a laugh again.

"I'll not do that," I promised. "Why should I speak to his Highness of Mrs. Barlow?"

"Why, indeed?" returned Frances Richmond drily. "Nor His Majesty, nor our pretty James, her pretty James. I told him once that he was so beautiful he would die young (thinking of her, poor soul, all the time), and he laughed with his head back, and vowed he was not good enough! Neither was she, alas! I fear—but I don't know. It's ancient

[1] Lucy Walter, *ob.* 1658.

history, sixteen years ago and—buried history to most of us. I told him once—that was the only time I ever mentioned her name, but I thought he might like to know. We used to quarrel so! James and I are a generation apart. Really I think I'm a year, maybe two, older than he, and that," said her Grace thoughtfully, "makes me quite his aunt, though neither of us will ever be as old as his wife Anna, and she's two years younger than he is, she *says!* Eh bien, we'd quarrelled rather badly, and it was my fault, the only time it ever was my fault, of course, and I wanted to make it up, and I—I just told him. And he looked like stone, quite hard all at once, I could not believe he could ever look so hard, and repeated: 'No Stuart can help me now,' and then he suddenly broke down. Poor James, he was about seventeen then, as tall as he is to-day, but he just dropped down on a cushion next to the chair I sat in and put his head into my lap and cried for ever so long. He made me cry too, and I don't often cry," she added with a little wry face. "Crying's of no use. But I sometimes think she would have been glad if she could have seen us both weeping for her, the young girl who did try to help, and the little boy they took away from her by force. I am a fool, I shall be sentimental in a moment, and that I will never be again. So one forgets; you'll forget; James has forgotten! He adored her—he adored 'Madame.' Ah, 'Madame!' how I adored her at Versailles, how His Majesty adored her—and she's dead, she died four years ago, and it might be fourteen. *We go on.*"

She looked at me. "You'll find the Stuarts go on, my dear!"

"I've found it," I replied. "I go on myself. Can't you see that? And now?"—the Duchess's maids drew back the many-coloured cotton "mob" enswathing her,

and she stood up, her lovely coiffure finished, her purple velvet gown showing every line of her tall figure, yet spreading opulently about her.

"And now?" she echoed, "my diamonds, Hortense, the earrings and the great pendant—so—and my pearls" (they were deftly slung round her slim throat), "and the pearl drop just to clasp this long curl behind my ear—that's new! They'll ask me did that notion come from Versailles? and I'll say, 'From a far finer place, mesdames, my head!'" She turned about and walked once more before her mirror. "Ah," she said, regarding the radiant reflection, "I wish you had seen me at my best, all the same!"

I rose and laughed. "It is difficult," I replied, "to imagine a better than this."

"Take my word for it then, it was better; but this" —she looked back at herself just once more—"this is good enough still, eh? See how entirely vain we can be. But you're not vain."

"Not vain?" I said; "I'm nothing else! Some day you will know me better. Vain enough, Duchess, to think that thirty-four is a good enough age for me, and grey hair good enough even for the King's palace, and the exquisite dress of my most beautiful cousin, the loveliest thing I ever donned!" and we went gaily out of the room and down to her waiting coach.

She was no sentimentalist; Frances Stuart never kissed me, never proffered "sympathy," never "condoled" with me in any of my troubles or difficulties, she just *did* kind things, she just *was* kind, and gay, and light-hearted in what the world thought the unfeeling selfish Stuart fashion; I knew better.

A few years more, and she withdrew from Court and her many admirers, and lived alone surrounded by her pets, beautiful still, every now and then flash-

ing like a meteor across public life—her latest appearance was at the Coronation of Queen Anne!—but in a self-chosen loneliness I cannot quite understand. If you always look for a Stuart's reasons, though, you will not find any. At a certain point, in any Stuart, a door will be politely shut in your face.

I have lingered long over this my dressing to attend the Court for the first time, for I see so clearly my fair benefactress just as she was then, *at a time when History had ceased to gossip about her*, her marvellous girlish bloom of the early sixties was over, and her part in public life had become slight. I never stayed with her again, there was no need for it, as will presently be seen, but since I owe her so large a debt, it is but right that I should acknowledge it. No Stuart could help Lucy Walter at the end of her tragic young life, after the death of her son and his father no Stuart helped me, but our cases were different. They were alike in one thing only, I think, we gave the Stuarts our hearts, and, as Charles wrote to poor early-dead 'Madame' (yet very little earlier dead than Lucy), "You have my heart, and I cannot give you more!"

WHITEHALL

CHAPTER III

WHITEHALL

"Ere I know it—next moment I dance at the King's."
BROWNING.

So I came to Whitehall!

There was music, heavenly music, the best I had ever heard, in a suite of rooms, none very large or imposing, leading one into another, but not the great saloons, the Banqueting Hall, the State Ball-room; just a string of some half-dozen apartments. One for the musicianers, and one where was set out an elaborate collation, one full of deftly arranged chairs and seats of several kinds, one empty of all furniture—cool, glowing with soft subdued light, mellowed gilding, fine pictures, gorgeous hangings, metal-work, carving by Grinling Gibbons, cut crystal, shining floors, a King's palace on a night when he chose to summon a few friends—the general effect remains, the details have gone.

I cannot recall my actual presentation to the Queen, but newly returned from Bath and Bristol; somehow I only remember her pathetic little face, her fine gown and jewels, her unaltering air of being out of place, still a stranger, after twelve years in her husband's home and country!—her halting English, her inability to sustain any sort of conversation—Catherine the Incapable, who could do but one thing, give her heart to one man, and he beggared in the giving.

There are times when I look back to the Royal Stuarts and to those from whom they had all, and

whom they sent empty away—or worse, kept by them, penniless, bankrupt of their own free will. And the Stuarts never seemed to know what they had done! Yet, despite these thoughts, I can answer for it that to some of us whom they utterly despoiled, they gave in return all that was worth having in life. Once, in this existence, a man said to me, "How much you give, but, by Heaven, how much you require in return!" and I realised at that moment how completely a Stuart I was—long, long before I ever knew I had inherited a drop of their blood. I owe them no ill-will. I know what they gave me then, in person, as friendly gifts to life. I know what they have given me now by inheritance, and I do not complain.

I would rather be a Stuart than any one else in the world, and because I know how mistaken that choice is, I know how completely Stuart I am!

Of the fine company assembled that night, one or two stand out in my recollection, more from what I observed than what I can recall of my personal relations with them, even of His Majesty. I remember best a certain incident towards the end of the evening. Of how my Duchess looked, I have but one eye-memory to go by, and that, too, was towards the close of the entertainment. Buckingham, whom I saw for the first time, was not en veine, he was apparently ill, or profoundly bored (I knew afterwards his star was nearing eclipse) he looked unspeakably overblown—a barmaid remnant of good looks always too extravagant—his gorgeous blue satins too bright, too effeminately cut, too much lace, too much fine lawn, heels too high, perriwig too golden and too curled, emphasising the ravaged, debauched face with its once splendid features blunted, and its clear skin blotched—a tragedy to me! I saw him

again soon after, looking far better, younger, and more like the portraits of his earlier self; but my first view of him was very like my last (he fell out of favour soon after that time and came not to Court for some years), and I vow that the impression made on me was that of wit and birth, brains and beauty, misused, soiled, squandered. I thought of his still more handsome father, and his beauty and wit, his loves, his tragic death, of the heroic fighting finish of his other son, and now—the waning of the glories of this one. It was sadder than the decay of any woman's looks. Buckingham has kept me, as well as the Duchess Frances, in absolutely helpless giggles for hours at a stretch by his incomparable powers of mimicry, carried out before his victims' faces—handsome John Churchill's "silly-silly!" Sunderland's Court drawl and seductive diplomatic mannerisms; Arlington's fussy stolidity and lapses into the earlier manner of "Harry Bennet, who was but a very little gentleman!" old Clarendon's tutorial tones when addressing the King; even His Highness of York's stubborn repetition of certain phrases, and insolent drooping of heavy Stuart eyelids; even Charles's twinkle and tricks of speech and movement—nothing was sacred, and nobody.

Buckingham paid no attention to me, he thought me beneath his notice, till one day some time later, at a date when he was running Monmouth for all he was worth, he spitefully took him off before an audience of whom I was one. I am no mimic in this life—perhaps I was then!—anyhow, my Stuart temper gave me wits, and I, without a seeming effort, at once took off Buckingham to his face, playing his own game. *He* was clever enough to see it; in fact, his surprise betrayed him to the company, who, true to seventeenth-century tradition, were quite as well pleased to laugh at him as with him. After my one

little triumph his Grace of Bucks liked me none the better, but he paid me the compliment of noticing I was there!

I do not remember anything of Lord Rochester that night, nor my Lord Sunderland, nor many other great men who must have been present. I recollect Lady Sunderland, chiefly, I think, because at one time I was seated next to her and she did me the honour of being deftly and admirably rude, to my immense inward amusement. You see, on our arrival, after my presentation to Her Majesty, and a word of greeting from the King, I made a point of retiring more or less into the background to a spot from which I could see what was going on, therefore most of the guests had no idea who I was. Frances herself was held in talk for some time by the Queen and another of her ladies, and finally surrounded by several men, among whom were Lord Mulgrave and Sir George Hamilton, another of her old adorers, now the (first) husband of another Frances, Sarah Jennings' sister, afterwards Fighting Dick Talbot's Duchess. She sat, as she herself had predicted, in the center of the room, the lesser-born ladies as a rule occupying the sides or even corners—not that the Countess of Sunderland would have considered herself as classed under that heading, that "great golden pearl," still fair and very splendid to behold, with a profusion of flaxen ringlets and white shoulders, and an over-fine gown of amber and gold velvet brocade of huge design. But she, like me, as I afterwards learnt, did a good deal of looking-on when at Court!

The guests arrived at various times, just after we got there the French Lady made her appearance with some empressement. I found her less lovely than I had anticipated, but with the small, regular, immobile features of a woman who would probably live to a great age (as she did), a certain Parisian

quality we now call chic, and with decided capability underlying her babyish expression. I was deeply interested in her, and admired, unwillingly, the way in which she carried off a distinctly difficult gown of bright red of an almost brick-dust hue, adorned with some priceless lace which I at once recognised as the latest from France, and no jewels nor patches at all, her perfectly glorious hair evidently being so plentiful as to prove hard to arrange in the new vogue. She took a seat by one of the windows and apparently complained of the heat, fanning herself a little petulantly with an exquisitely painted fan, glancing towards the closed curtains with an almost invisible swiftness from her usually inexpressive and somewhat obliquely-set if fine dark eyes. A couple of gentlemen moved forward and drew back the hangings, letting in a flood of moonlight.

I see that so well, Louise de Querouaille's slight but dignified figure, in a magnificent elbow chair—she never sat in one without arms; I thought of the prized honour of the tabouret at Versailles and smiled to myself!—the great window draperies of golden damask behind her, and the strange mingling of moonlight and candleshine on her face and neck. King Charles sauntered across and made some amused remark upon the grateful coolness; he took up his stand beside her, between her chair and the open casement, and I was free to turn my attention to him.

Perhaps, among all the pictures of him stored in my memory, this stands out the first that is perfectly clear, many as there were to follow it. He was wearing a colour unusal to him, as I afterwards learned—a brown brocade, as nearly as possible approaching the hue of cedar-wood. Against the golden curtain, the gilding and the brown of the panelled and decorated wall behind it, leant the tall, thin, big-

boned, loose-limbed but always graceful figure, with the large but perfectly shaped hands and feet, the heavy black perriwig, the gipsy darkness of the ugly but eternally attractive face,[1] standing out in artistic harmony and contrast. Not a feature of Charles's face was anything but ugly, save his deeply sad, deeply humorous eyes, so nearly black as to seem entirely so at night, and his perfect teeth—everything else was out of drawing and strangely over-accentuated, "harsh," in the term of his time—the olive skin hanging so loosely as to make the lines on his face deep furrows in appearance, though, as with all Stuarts, he had a quality of perennial youth about him that was unmistakeable to the end. There he stood, leaning back a little, bending a little over the Duchess of Portsmouth at times when the music rose louder, occaisonally taking a pinch of snuff, once stooping to caress a beautiful little red and white spaniel, that stretched itself upon its hind legs to his hand. "Mrs. Carwell" talked quickly in the French way, at times very seriously, in a low voice. He listened chiefly, and did not say much. Once he cleverly hid a yawn with his long thin hand, and it was at that moment I saw his face change.

Through the door opposite entered a late comer, at a rush, a boyish figure that almost ran on Mercury-winged feet, paused, looked round, discovered the King and threaded its way through the intervening crowd, with a smile or a nod or a light laughing word here and there, and was beside His Majesty in an instant, bending low and kissing his hand. I saw Charles look down at the bent head, and once and

[1] "The Stuarts, when they were ugly, did the thing handsomely" (Vansittart).

for all said to myself: "This is where the King's heart is!" Another bow, a kiss of Mme. de Portsmouth's fingers, a lithe young back straightened, dark curls, but not so dark as Charles's, flung back, bright soft eyes roaming gaily round the room, the sweetest voice I have ever heard, speaking slowly, for all the quick movements of the figure, an explanation, a sort of smiling apology (quite sure that none was required except by Court custom!) as to the lateness of the hour,—and some one behind my chair commented in a carefully whispered sneer, "Late as usual! These ladies, how they make a man lose count of time!"

As I still watched, the new-comer made a swift half-bow, half-backward step or two away from the King, and moved behind the Duchess of Richmond's place, a hand on the carved frame of the settee on which she then sat with another lady—the Countess of Falmouth, I think, who, if memory serves me, married the famous Lord Dorset en secondes noces somewhere about then—bending over between them both with a gay greeting; and I can see, as if I saw it but yesterday, Frances's handsome face, elusively resembling his, raised, along with one exquisite hand for his kiss, with the easy grace and joyous mirth of an old friend or relation.

And I said to myself, "*Now* I know, this is the Duke of Monmouth. How dull of me not to recognise him before!"

They remained there a moment or two, Lady Falmouth, also beautiful and warmly dark, smiling and listening amiably to the chatter between them, Frances, all animation, evidently in a teasing mood, and Monmouth, still smiling, still holding her hand upraised to his behind her, his face in half shadow under the candles immediately above it, "that most beautiful face ever seen on man or woman." I took

in every detail of his dress and frankly admired it more than that of any other man present—a complete suit of oyster-white silk, thick, creamy in texture, almost pale-grey, round the slim waist a sash of a perfect shade of malachite green, green silk stockings, and among the laces at his wrist a bracelet of emeralds, evidently intended to be hidden (at any rate, more or less!), and a perfect square emerald, diamond-set, at his throat, confining a narrow green velvet ribbon that tied his Venetian point cravat. So I watched them from my quiet corner, and saw the King's eyes stray that way, and smile with them in their laughter; and then I heard the Duchess of Richmond's voice raised a little.

"Yes, another cousin, mon enfant. I have carried her here to-night at His Majesty's request to see all you fine gentlemen. She will make a new playfellow for you," and she turned about in her seat and looked in my direction, caught my eye, and smiled and nodded at me. Monmouth followed her gaze with the quickness of a child eager for a fresh toy.

And now I have to relate one of the funniest incidents of my career at the Restoration Court, considering the part that I was to play, for, courtier as he was, nothing was more obvious in my sight than the fact that the first glimpse Monmouth had of me was *a great disappointment to him!* I saw it, and it is useless to deny that I may pride myself on having a share of the Stuart humour, for I felt no anger nor humiliation myself—I merely understood, in a twinkling, that this delightful young man, then at the zenith of his victorious career where women were concerned, who flew from mistress to mistress as light hearted as he was light footed, had hoped from Frances Richmond's description that he would find a young girl as a new amusement and possible victim,—

though victim is never the word to use where Monmouth is concerned, somehow!

And, when he followed her glance, he found a grey-haired lady in sober attire that loomed black in shadow, a woman who was in fact the mother of a grown son who looked nearly as old as Monmouth himself. I dropped my eyes to my hands, folded demurely on my lap; not that I wished to avoid his look, but that if I were not to laugh aloud I must make a supreme effort to smother my mirth. "A new playfellow?" I thought; but Frances was right and I—and his disappointed Grace—were wrong, as was proved within the next few minutes!

The music had ceased for a while: the guests mostly rose, changed attitudes and partners, moved about the gold and brown room, a brave company truly, of inimitably handsome English men and women of the upper classes, perfectly dressed, perfect, also, in their easy self-possession and accomplished wit and insolence of bearing;—changed and shifted in a glitter of jewels and embroideries, flushes of intense colour, gleaming white of beautiful shoulders and draperies of ivory and silver, sheen of great pearls, and a hundred shades of brune and blonde locks—the ripples of the men's perukes, the long ringlets and massed curls of the women's coiffures—and behind them the figure of their King by his mistress's chair, russet against gold, his dark eyes seeing all.

I do not believe Charles II was an extremely clever man, I am quite sure I was a woman of average intelligence, but I do think this: that he and I lived open-eyed in a world of fools whose gaze turned inwards if anywhere! and who, mostly, failed to notice me all my life, and beheld him, their King, with eyes which were darkened. That is the only way I can account for it. I am aware that few

people ever penetrated to that guarded heart—oh yes, I know what "love" he gave his women, he was a man of great strength and vitality, of very strong passions; he "loved" often and much, as did his son, but —why, Henrietta Wentworth and I could have told you what their real love could be!—she, heart of Monmouth's heart, I, just the friend of both Charles and Monmouth—and I tell you that I went to a lonely old age long years after they were both dead, warm still with the memory of the love I had seen Charles give to Monmouth and Monmouth give to Henrietta; and I would not have exchanged their abiding affection for me for the "love" they ever gave any other woman.

I own to have travelled far in these last lines from the moment when my cousin Frances came through the crowd to my corner crying, "You have sat there long enough with your big eyes fixed on us all as if we were a raree show. Stand up and say something kind to this poor boy who is so mighty bashful and has no one to speak to!" and in a burst of laughter Monmouth and I met for the first time.

If I were horribly ancient—when you look for a girl of sixteen and find a woman old enough to be her mother, it is tiresome!—at least I could see a joke. My dear James, always my dear James from that night forth to me, I saw many jokes later that escaped you, but none better, after all, I think, than our first meeting and the way it turned out. For as he straightened himself after his salute to pay some usual compliment in his delightful voice, with the Stuart side-glance and the tilt of the Stuart lip, the band in the next room but one struck up a quaint little rambling air—quick, sweet, familiar—and into his eyes, that before had betrayed no particular interest in me, flashed a sudden gleam of recollection, answered by the same flash, I vow, in mine.

"Why," I cried, and paused, as he also said, "Why—Oh! that tune, it is the old, *old*, OLD dance I learned"—he, too, paused—"in Holland, when I was little more than a baby! My lady Duchess!" he wheeled upon Frances, "you know it? Surely you danced it in your young (very young!) days at Versailles?—No? Madame," he was back again to me, "*you* did—you have been in Holland?"

"Never, sir," I said, "but it was taught me by one who had been there. I did not know that any one in England could dance it but myself."

"I can!" he cried, with that same eager pleasure of a child with a new toy. "Why, indeed I can, and, Madame, you——"—he was gone through the gorgeous throng that made way for him, he was standing by Charles, a word, a pleading, a laugh, and he was back again almost ere Frances had finished a slow infinitely amused smile and a pat on my wrist with her fan.

"So you dance, my nun, after all? Oh, then, James will never let you sit in a corner again!"

I began to speak. I suppose I tried to explain I was really still in mourning. I could not dream of—— "It will be a Royal command, you'll see. You will not be asked!"

I was not asked, and that is the truth.

My début at Whitehall I signalised scandalously by taking the floor of the adjoining room to that in which we were all assembled—a saloon cleared for dancing, as a matter of fact, if required—while in the one beyond the company of fiddlers went on with the little winding murmuring tune. I was caught by the hand, I was led through a surprised assemblage of great lords and ladies by an impetuous boy whom I had only known one minute, and handed to the

center of the apartment. Monmouth faced me, struck a light foot on the parquet and turned to the band with an order. The music ceased, only to begin again, and I wondered in my heart if this were a dream or a reality, sank to the polished boards in a long swooning curtsey, recovered, looked at him, laughed to his laughter, and swam forward into the opening steps of the old single coranto.

Through the width of the double doors I could still see Charles standing, smiling, watching us both keenly; and, with the sudden realisation that I was on probation, being tried, that these two, father and son, the finest dancers in the kingdom, would judge, and accept or refuse me as a kinswoman worthy of their attention by my performance that night, I set my teeth and made a vow to myself that I would prove my quality. Dancing was, dancing is, my passion—therein lay my luck! (A man who paid court to me at Whitehall in after years, sarcastically remarked, as he had heard me say myself, that my heart was in my feet, nowhere else. "Ah, sir," I said, "it is better so, than that my feet should be on your heart"; and we parted friends and neither of us a penny the worse.) But I think of that dance now, and laugh with the sheer joy of the memory of my partner's skill, never, and I have danced with many men—all the best in England and Holland—had I a partner to approach Monmouth, not even the King himself. That perfectly built, perfectly balanced young frame, elastic, silk and steel, the marvellous "dancing ear" that is sometimes allied to a dancing figure and sometimes is not, that true Stuart love of the art, that impetuous, imperious wilfulness of eternal youth—thus I first knew them, and thus I kept, to the very end, my impression of my cousin James.

The measure was a somewhat unusual one for its

birthplace and date, swifter, less elaborate, less full of the dignified bowings and backings that made some of the dances still in vogue in those gayer, "faster" days, more of a ceremony than a set of steps. My memory held good; once his failed. He stopped, he burst into schoolboy merriment. "Lord, I'm undone!" he cried. "Odso,[1] Madame, you have the best of me!" as (bold, I really think beyond pardon!) I went on with my part alone, he stood and applauded, and in a moment struck his breast with a mock-indignant hand, a favourite trick, as History knows, and exclaimed, "I have it again!—thus, is it not? and thus," and the music swept us on, and, quickening to the close, whirled us into ever-increasing swiftness, and left us, as I well remembered it would do, panting (even he), laughing still, hand in hand in the centre of the floor just as we had begun.

The room was not empty now, several couples had filed in, and one or two groups of older people, glasses were raised, I was looked up and down, whispers passed behind fans. Conscious that I had not failed, but likewise suddenly acutely aware of a much too prominent position, I felt the colour rush up under my ceruse, and my laughter died suddenly.

"Oh, my lord Duke," I said, as bashfully as the girl of sixteen he had expected to see, "I should not have done this! His Majesty will say——"

"His Majesty said you were to do it," said Monmouth, his eyes crinkled up with amusement, looking down at me full of a boy's unfeigned enjoyment in the confusion of a companion in mischief. "Eh, Sir?" and he glanced round. It did not reduce my blushes to find the King beside us, both still in our positions

[1] This known to have been Monmouth's favourite oath, as "Oddsfish" was that of his father.

in the middle of the room. He put a hand on James's shoulder, he turned to look from his son's face to mine.

"Welcome," he said very softly to me, in the kindest and most reassuring of voices; never did man or woman put one more at ease than this vilified King, make one feel happier, more pleased with one's self! "Doubly welcome, since you've found your heart again. I see I was wrong to prophesy you would have none for the poor entertainment I could offer," and he stood by his son, taller, darker, different and yet subtly like, smiling the selfsame smile.

"If I have not found my heart, Your Majesty," I said with an effort—all this blushing shamefacedness was "playing baby" in a woman of my standing—"I have apparently found my feet! But I had the fortune to know this old dance" . . . and then I stopped, for Charles was looking at me with a mouth that smiled still, but eyes that were unutterably sad.

"Yes," he said, "so had I—once. James and I were taught it when we were both young and foolish, and you, Mistress, you had it brought you from the same country? And you had as good a teacher, may I say it? and your teacher as apt a pupil as James has proved," and he smiled upon his son again.

"A good deal apter, Sir," remarked that young gentleman, "since I broke down in the middle! I have no memory, you know."

"No, James," returned the King, "I know you have no memory," and between us for one instant there passed a flicker of that mutual comprehension that never was obscured again. We understood each other—good. And we understood James. And he understood neither of us, no—but that was James all over. His destiny in life was not to understand,

I think. I wonder how much sport the Fates would have had of James if he had ever understood?

"On my life, my dear soul!" said the Duchess of Richmond to me, giving me another little rap with her fan, as her great coach swung forward from the entrance of the palace and rolled majestically over the cobbles towards home. "That was none so bad a beginning, but you sly ladies who sit in corners by preference——!"

"Do not quiz me, Duchess," I implored penitently, in a rather troubled voice, "I misdoubt me 'twas foolish behaviour, and you know well I never intended to make myself conspicuous. And I do think I danced too soon, you should have let me go in my weeds after all, and then perhaps——"

"Oh, silly," cried Frances, laughing at my long face. "If you had gone in your shroud James would have made you dance, he would pull you out of your coffin if he wanted a partner! He's a feather-brain, like me, but saw you ever so fine a dancer? You should—and shall—see him ride, and run, and at sword-play, and tennis, and any feat of arms or sport you care to name. And he's a pretty spark, my word, but he walks on broken hearts—or dances over them. Bad all through. No, he's not, I'll amend it. He's worthless—as yet. He's a butterfly, or an air-bubble, just that—light, only light. Some day he may get something inside his handsome head and he may find he's got a heart inside that fine broad chest of his. I don't know. He's spoilt. I can't tell if he's spoiled, it's another thing. His mother"—she threw out her hands in the gloom of the coach with an absolutely French gesture—"and my cousin his father! What can you expect?"

"I expected nothing so delightful," I smiled.

"You'll fall in love with him, they all do," said her Grace. "I'll give you a week to fall in, and then a week to fall out, mind."

"Don't fear for me," I said cynically, "I shall not *fall in love* with him. I'm seasoned. But I *love* him already. Only—he does go to one's head rather, and I think he made a fool of me . . . and OH!" with a gasp of remembrance, "I made no adieux to Her Majesty! How could you let me be so remiss?"

There was another light laugh from the Duchess. "Ah, Her Majesty. You did not see she had retired early? No, nor did anybody but her immediate entourage and myself, I think. Hey-dey! Would you be a Queen?" This from Frances Stuart, who would have been a Queen herself had Catherine died a few years back. I could not answer for a moment.

"Do not love a Stuart, do not marry a Stuart, do not serve a Stuart," she added earnestly, her hand on mine.

"Why, you did all three," I could not help saying, and I got the answer I might have expected: "That is why I say it," as the coach pulled up at the door of the house, and a Stuart Duchess and her Stuart kinswoman returned from the reception of a Stuart King.

WINDSOR

CHAPTER IV

WINDSOR

"The King's Kinswoman."

NEXT day the country mouse was undisguisedly tired after her dissipation, and, may I add, a trifle stiff? A reminder, as I scornfully remarked, of my aging bones set suddenly a-jigging! The weather was very hot, and my cousin and I spent our morning in the garden behind the house, where were several fine trees, and an exquisite little fountain after the fashion of Versailles, in miniature, that Frances had had erected in imitation, the tinkle of falling water, the scent of the roses, the flutter of green leaves made one forget the rumble of the traffic in the streets beyond.

The footmen having carried out a divan for my hostess and a day-bed for me, both piled with cushions, we reclined in the shade pretending to work, and now and then unashamedly dozing—at least, I did. I had had little sleep during the night, the unwonted, unexpected excitement, the varying emotions of the past evening, the slight uneasiness still lingering in my mind as to what King Charles really thought of me (I smiled to myself as I realised that I cared not a jot for any one else's opinion!) all conduced to nervousness. Frances Richmond and I both lay late, therefore, and, when we did appear, still wore our undress—she a beautiful Parisian loose gown of finest white muslin curiously embroidered with

black and a black lace scarf over her undressed hair; I, mindful of my seniority, with my hair done as usual, but in a wrapper of thin black silk, very simple, with loose sleeves, revealing my white frilled smock at the neck and elbows.

It was a pleasure to watch the Duchess. "From the crown of her head to the sole of her foot she was beautiful exceedingly," save for the slight blemishes left by the smallpox, on her fair skin. As she leaned back among the cushions, her arms, outstretched and thrown back above her head, gleamed whitely through the muslin and laces of her robe à la négligence, perfect in their rounded outline, her tiny feet and slender ankles, crossed upon another cushion on the grass, were as exquisitely modelled in their way, and the more I looked at her, the more I was reminded of her young kinsman at Whitehall. No one was ever more handsome than a handsome Stuart! But she had her caprices. On certain days she admitted all and sundry who waited upon her; that morning she barred her doors to the world and would see no one. "Nay, child, don't argue with me," she cried, ever so little pettish. "They talk and they talk and—and I talk and I talk, and I'm tired of it!" She sounded the silver bell that stood beside her, a man instantly appeared. "Bid the porter deny me," she ordered, flinging herself back on her cushions. "Stay"—she looked at me and her smiles returned—"should his Grace of Monmouth wait on Madame Stuart, admit him to the blue cabinet!"

"*Oh!*" I said, below my breath, but she laughed outright.

"Forgive me, why should I not say that? If he comes not, what's lost? If he doth come, you'll be pleased to see him," and she tossed a lace handkerchief into the air and caught it again.

But he did not come!—and she might have spared

the order. Something else did, however: a messenger from the Court for her, and she had him shown to the identical blue closet, while at the same time another footman brought out a pile of letters, all for her save one, and that for me—a dull, lawyer-like document that, on her departure, I turned over distastefully.

It may have been dull to look at, it was not dull to read.

So little had I expected to hear from my man of business that I had omitted to tell him I was leaving my country lodgings, hence it had been delayed, and I should have received it several days sooner. I had it early enough! When I had mastered the contents I sat with a blanched face and a beating heart, looking round me in pure dismay. I will not weary you with my affairs, but, briefly, my little income was at an end. My son was fighting abroad, the small Hertfordshire property was unlet and in disrepair, and, for the moment, yielded nothing whatever to provide payment of my tiny jointure. My lawyer, thinking me far from town, had written these black facts, fancying my presence in London to talk matters over was impossible. So here was my fate, the cruellest trick Fortune had ever played me, to leave me penniless on the threshold of the great gay world I already loved and longed to share in . . . and, I make no excuse for it, I swore as roundly as Mrs. Nelly herself!

The concluding words met my returning cousin, who looked at me, at the letter on the lawn, and went off into a peal of laughter.

"Stab me!" she said; "these men, how they plague us! What has he done to deserve such a drubbing? You've a pretty long tongue, my dear, but it's useful to keep by you in cases of emergency." Then she really saw my tragic face. "Why, what

is it? Sure, I never meant to tease you—*who* is it, then? I'll settle him for you." She picked up the letter. "May I read?" She read, and put it down, not on the grass this time. "Is that all?" she said coolly.

"All?" I exclaimed. "Yes, it is all, my all, and about enough, I think. My dear Duchess, here your débutante retires to a convent—if she can find one to take her without two pence!"

"And she a member of the Reformed Religion?" asked the Duchess, still lightly, still amused. "I cannot say the prospect is gay."

"I have done with gaiety," I said sadly. "Now, my kind friend, let me be serious. I'll go up to my room and think things over."

"Why, do," said Frances. "Have a good cry; that's better than thinking. I'm summoned to Court—the Queen has a card-party and desires my attendance. Also, since I hear the Court moves to Windsor next week and Her Majesty has a mind for me to join them, I am to be told their arrangements, and make mine." My heart, which I had thought sunk to my shoes before, seemed to drop through the ground—at the gay prospect for her only, the splendid doings in the beautiful old Castle. I had heard talk of the sham fight to be enacted, the taking of Maestricht, in which Monmouth was to win his laurels over again, the unwithered laurels of last year's campaign.

Well, I had stayed long enough in this house, perhaps, anyhow—and—the tears were coming as I turned to the garden-door. Frances took a swift step after me and caught me by my arm.

"Look at me," she commanded, and I saw, for all her teasing laughter, the kindness in her beautiful eyes. "Now go, and cry if you must—but you need not!—and any thinking you do will be wasted. Wait

till I return to-night! Now I must dress. I'll bid them serve your supper in your cabinet. I insist!" (Down came the imperious foot.) "More, I'll order out the Imperial Tokay. A glass of that will put heart into you—two glasses! and I shall be back, not so very late, and I will come to your room and finish the bottle!" and she went indoors, laughing as usual, and ran up the stairs like a child to a nursery instead of a widowed Duchess, calling for her maids to come and dress her.

' So I went up to my bedchamber, and though I tried not to think, I did not weep much, either.

A radiant vision stood by my bed, not so very early, somewhere about two in the morning! and smiled down upon me as I lifted my head from the pillows. "Am I not a rake?" said Frances Richmond, waving a taper, which scattered twinkling light upon her charming figure and, I fear, a shower of wax upon the floor. "But there were the affairs of the nation to discuss as well as my winnings at ombre and basset to count. I won near fifty pound (it will buy this room a new carpet!). Think, my cousin, now, if you will. We go to Windsor with the Court; *we*, mark you. His Majesty has sent you another command!" I could not speak for a moment.

"You?—you?" I tried to ask, and she shook her head.

"There you're wrong. It was not I, for all I'll tell you the plan was in my head, but Charles was before me. He's been making inquiries about you, do you feel frightened? No! Well, I gather he knows as much about your affairs as you do yourself, for Will Chiffinch has had your snuffy old attorney in cross-examination, and—oh yes, it's true,

you're successfully ruined, and all the better for you! The King, my dear, took me aside and told me in a very few words, and he finished by saying, 'Now you must be my ambassadress, and I my new cousin's banker. I trust you. Bring her with you to Windsor, let her forget her troubles, and we'll all be happy together; and tell her I preached you a sermon—I hear enough of 'em!—on the text of taking no thought for the morrow, and she is to bear that in mind. While we are there we'll find her something' (you will not be offended?" she brought the wavering candle closer to my eager face) "'we'll find her something to do, or something to be, or some lover to take, even,' he added, rubbing his chin, and glancing at me. But that's his way, he hath too frank a wit for some people."

"He hath too good a heart for most, as good as yours," I cried in a trembling voice.

"Ha, my dear, don't call me good, or I shall realise I'm an old woman," pouted Frances. "Didst finish the Tokay? No, then, let us drink to the future, my nun who shall not retire to a nunnery if we can help it!"

Not to be wearisome with over much detail, I will tell in a few words how my plans were made. I had no clothes fit for Court wear, as you know, at any rate, no outer garments; but in those days I was a great needlewoman, and my laced petticoats and frilled smocks were all of my own fashioning, my gowns having been, for nearly a year, my widow's weeds. Thus it was decreed that new half-mourning dresses I must have. Also a mantua, and a travelling hood and cloak of modish cut, while such like details as my gloves, laces, shoes, stockings, kerchiefs, all the hundred-and-one trifles of a lady of fashion's outfit, must be renewed or purchased afresh. His

Majesty had sent me word that he would be my banker, but that I immediately relegated to the limbo of pretty speeches. If he were going to provide me with board and lodging in the shape of a visit to Windsor, what more could I take from him, even in thought? and I certainly was not going to run up bills for his paying! I lay awake and thought and thought—yes, I did some thinking then—and by morning my mind was made up. A few fine feathers I must have, also I must provide myself with a maid, whom I had hitherto managed without, albeit badly, for to a lonely lady in that century a confidential woman who would indeed act as a companion on "going abroad" was almost a necessity, and would certainly have proved one, had I been Frances Richmond's age instead of my own!

So I came to a positive conclusion, and when we met at breakfast, my cousin and I, I had my resolution so firmly fixed that despite her endeavours to stop me I insisted on giving her my plans. Would she of her great kindness direct me to her jeweller and then her dressmaker? for I intended to sell the black pearls and fit myself out as finely as might be, if jewel-less, during the week still left.

The family obstinacy fought the family obstinacy! I reduced her to silence and respectful attention, but if she kept a solemn face, her eyes were sparkling like impish diamonds all the while. "My coach is ordered to carry me to those very places myself this noon," she remarked. "Come you with me, and you will find two heads better than one." I was glad in one way, for I felt her imposing presence would add weight to my humbler dealings, but I did not understand, and mistrusted, the light in her eye.

On the way there she told me, with her usual swift directness, that her mind, too, was made up.

"Now hearken. Master Webben, who hath as keen an eye for a pearl as any merchant I know—he restrung me His Majesty's necklace and vowed he had seldom seen finer, only this last year—shall put a value on those of yours, the loveliest *collier* at Court!"

I said, a little sadly, that I feared they had paid their last visit there, and was met with a mocking smile.

"Now hearken," she said again. "He shall value your black pearls, and I, my friend, will pay you a fair price—not the full value, but as a loan, upon them. You shall share them with me, let me wear them now and then, while the sum I can perfectly well advance will cover your expenses. Hush!" as I tried to speak. "That is settled. Suppose he says £500, I lend you £200 on them, and we are both satisfied. In the future, when you have made your fortune, you take them back; or if you fall out with the Duchess of Monmouth irrevocably"—here a demure side-glance—"and are ruined altogether, why I shall pay you the rest and give your lovely necklace a safe home while I live. Nay," and she was serious again, "I mean it. I will be plain with you. My expenses during the past two years have been ridiculously slight. My jointure is small for a dowager Duchess, I own, but I have always His Majesty's allowance of £700 a year.[1] I can lay my hand on several idle hundreds at this moment, and I, too, am going to order some fine new garments. We'll go to the mantua-maker's directly we've done with Master Webben."

She beat me. I went on trying to argue, to force her at least to modify her generous scheme, till she

[1] This was reduced to £600 later, but paid her regularly always, even after Charles's death.

finally turned on me in the funniest little burst of feigned fury.

"I swear I'll play her *Dis*grace of Cleveland in a minute, and knock you flat into the gutter, as she did Rochester when he tried to kiss her!" she exclaimed. "Poor John! he's her cousin, and he kisses everybody——"

"And so does she," I suggested, sotto voce, and we both fell into school-girl giggles at the thought of my lying on my back in the kennel, as he did while her coach went forward splashing him from head to foot, his ardour undamped.

> "By Heaven, 'twas bravely done!
> First to attempt the chariot of the Sun,
> And then to fall like Phaeton!"

—and we were not over our laughter by the time we drew up at the little dark shop where dwelt Master Webben among his treasures.

"A fine—a very fine string, your Grace," he said, bowing over the pearls, and looking up at her, his jeweller's glass in his eye. "I would I could name a fair price. But times are hard . . ."

"My good idiot," said her Grace kindly, "thou[1] art not *offered* the pearls, but bidden to name their value!" He looked, half disappointed, half relieved.

"£750, your Grace, maybe £800 in a prosperous market. Not a penny less than £700." She nodded and bade him provide them with a case, repair for her the loop of the pearl pendant belonging to her Royal necklace, send an underling—trustable—to her house to clean all her diamonds ere the week was over, and we were in the coach again in a moment.

1 In the seventeenth century the lower orders were addressed as "thee" and "thou." The Quakers adopted the habit to carry out their treatment of all men as equals.

"So, you see!" she cried, "not a penny less than £700. I'll be a Jew, and as mean as a lawyer to you, cousin. I proffer but £300 for the share in your pearls; what say you? Will that set you up finely enough and leave you with a few broad pieces with which to play basset at the Queen's table? Aye, that would be mean, indeed, but I am going to give you my second sewing-maid. A good wench you will find her. I've just engaged another Frenchwoman; she's the only English, and it does not answer. She's not too young and not too pretty; you'll have no worry with her at Windsor, and she'll serve you well. Her wages? Ten pounds a year since she is to be at Court —oh! you don't know how the vails fly into the maids' pockets there!"

"But stop, stop," I cried, in the last effort to overtake circumstances. "I am not going to Court for life, my dearest Duchess, but just for a month to Windsor in your train, never to Whitehall!"

"Never to Whitehall?" said Frances, her head on one side regarding me as the coach paused at her mantua-maker's lodgings, "I'll lay, Charlotte, that in the future you'll be more at Whitehall than I! Come, is it a wager?"

It was not; but if it had been, I should have found myself even more deeply in debt to her whom men call La belle Stuart to this day—as kind as she was fair!

So I was commanded, so I was arranged for, financed, dressed, so I went to Windsor in attendance on my Duchess in the wake of the Court, so I saw many things and met many people, so I came to be fitted, insignificant piece of a puzzle, into the place Fate cut for me. What I had to give I gave—not all the men or the women of the Restoration Court could

say as much. It depends on what we have to offer; it depends on who asks it of us. I was asked by a King of England and his son for the one thing I could give them, and I gave it. That is all my story.

LIFE AT COURT

CHAPTER V

LIFE AT COURT

"I gave you the whole of my life, you gave me the half of your heart,
Half of your heart for a year or twain, for a year or three,
And then She came, who had waited aloof, apart;—
And what had you left for me?
All you could give you gave, all that I had you have,
All of my life while Life endures, if you will it so;
But never pardon of mine you shall come to crave,
I give you my leave to go!

She gave you the whole of her life, you gave her the whole of your heart,
(So you knew Love's self for a year or twain, for a year or three,)
And then Death came, who had waited aloof, apart,
And what has Life left for me?
I stand by your bier this summer night in a prison cell,
And see once more your beautiful face on the pillow,—so,
Sleep and forget, sleep lonely, sleep long, sleep well,—
I give you my leave to go."

Eleanor Needham to Monmouth.
M. N.

At the historic Castle I met nearly all those who were connected with my life at Court, or so it seems to me as I look back.

Some died before I left Whitehall for good, of course, and some retired voluntarily, some were bidden to go, new ambitious men and new beauties arose, young folk, among them many of the King's children, grew up, the youthful entourage of the Duke of York's second wife formed a separate Court with its own history (and troubles!) at St. James, and came, of course, to Whitehall, in the train of their Highnesses, when the Duke was not sent far afield by his brother's orders. That autumn he was in England;

he led the defeated side (somewhat sourly) against the victorious Duke of Monmouth in the Maestricht sham fight, which took place while the Court was at Windsor, in a meadow below the Castle, and at which I, among thousands of other spectators, was present. Later in the year the Duchess's maids of honour, with the Ladies Mary and Anne, gave Crowne's "Calisto," the famous masque, the Duke of Monmouth leading the dancing—that, too, I saw. The Duchess herself, and the Duchess of Monmouth, ceased to take an active part in the gaieties at Court when the autumn came, as her Highness was expecting her first child and the Duchess her third. It is to be regretted that the unfortunate incident which led to the disgrace of the St. James's maid of honour, Mrs. Needham, should have occurred. It was an unlucky finish to the Windsor festivities; the two Duchesses being much distressed about it, her Highness being very fond of Eleanor Needham, and Anna Monmouth taking the matter so much to heart that it made her quite ill, and she shut herself up for weeks and went nowhere. All this may be gathered from the disjointed fragment of a letter written by the Lady Mary at the time.[1] Unfortunately for my relations with their Highnesses of York, I was unwittingly drawn into the affair, out of sympathy with the culprit, though I need not set down the details here. After the public betrayal of the sinners by Mrs. Trevor,[2] Mrs. Needham fled incontinently without taking leave, sending word "that nobody should ever hear of her more."[3] I gather *we* were all classed under the head of "nobody," except Monmouth, who certainly heard a great deal!—echoes

[1] In the possession of Lord Bathurst, published in *Princess and Queen,* by Mary F. Sanders.

[2] Horace Walpole.

[3] *Vide* the Lady Mary, in an unpublished letter in the possession of Lord Bathurst.

of the way in which his wife dealt with him came faintly back to us. The King, I am sorry to say, laughed for an hour on end when he was first told the story! but he had his work cut out for him later: he had to defend and appease Anna, and be extremely severe with his son, he had to soothe the young Duchess of York, and allay the natural irritation of the Duke!

History does not relate, but *I* can, the fact that on the Court's return from Windsor, Charles had a serious but quite fruitless talk with Monmouth. Eleanor Needham's oblivion was ordered to be only temporary, and she was back in attendance the following year, forgiven by Mary of Modena, only to retire for good before long. This poor foolish girl was never more than an acquaintance of mine, but in after life I saw much of her handsome eldest son by Monmouth, Major-General James Crofts, and her lovely daughter Henrietta Duchess of Bolton was also my friend and correspondent, though we seldom met. In those two beautiful young people I was reminded more of their father than by any of his legitimate children.

I seem to be straying into side issues, but the fact is I am not going to set down here a complete account of my month at Windsor.

First of all, let me say that I played a very small part, sometimes not being bidden to attend more than once or twice in a week. I had no official status whatever; I was not lodged in the Palace, but in one of the smaller of the many houses of varying size in the town, where those who followed the Court from inclination or duty were put up. A quiet, modest, but comfortable lodging, sufficient for me and my maid was provided (and conveniently close). The

Duchess of Richmond was in the Castle itself, so we met much less frequently. The Duke of Monmouth owned a fine house, not a stone's throw from me, though he was there en garçon, Anna being out of health and remaining in town. The Yorks were in the Castle, of course, and some of their suite, but a couple of the Duchess's ladies (not Mrs. Needham) were lodged in the same house as I, and to them I was privately bidden to play duenna as much as possible—somewhat to my alarm!—directly I arrived. What possible authority could I have, I wondered?

But I was put to no trouble; they were both quiet, well-behaved girls, one being Elizabeth, elder of the two daughters of the Lady Mary's governess, Lady Frances Villiers, a damsel of much wit, whose conversation I always admired, but whose looks were spoiled for the general public by a slight cast in one eye ("the reverse of a squint," and the look turned outward, not inward), still in her teens, indeed, not more than seventeen or so I fancy, but I never knew her exact age; and the other a slender slip of a thing, pale, with lovely ash-blonde hair with strands and lights of auburn in it, darker eyes, lashes, and brows, a silent creature, hard to get to know, watchful—I soon found out whom she watched—aged, then, some eighteen summers, Henrietta, my Lady Wentworth of Nettlestead, new to her duties with Mary of Modena.

Lady Frances would have had both under her care, but the younger of her daughters, Anne, never strong, was then ill, and she had stayed with her in London. These two Villiers sisters were to become within a few short years, respectively William of Orange's mistress and the wife of his bosom friend William Bentinck—afterwards the King of England and the Duke of Portland!

Of the subsequent history of Henrietta Wentworth

the world is aware. But the time was not yet for any of these things.

I admit that Elizabeth Villiers attracted me most at first, chiefly because of her obvious cleverness, and, though she cared little for the society of her own sex, she preferred older women, and was considerably more expansive in her manner to me that she was to her somewhat shy and certainly proud young companion, upon whom I could make but little impression. I studied both girls, and predicted the future of a brilliant woman for Mrs. Villiers—to hear her talk to a clever man was worth sitting silent by the hour, listening! Lady Wentworth's Royalist family history I knew something of, and their fighting record—her splendid Cavalier grandfather, old Lord Cleveland; his son, who pre-deceased him, Lord Wentworth, whose portrait I had seen, a sad-faced man with long eyes and a self-contained look, whom his daughter somewhat resembled except in colouring; her incomprehensible mother, whom the Court laughed at (much as it had done at Lady Wemyss, Anna's mother), an extraordinary person, Dutch-born though of British parentage, passionate, inordinately ambitious, a vulgarian and a snob. And yet Henrietta was her only daughter, utterly unlike her, but with a goal (for some little while I could not guess what), evidently kept always before her eyes. A mysterious personality, hers, which no advances of mine could at first thaw.

And advances were my order of the day then! Before I had got as far as Windsor I had realised that if I meant to play any part in Court life, I must make up my mind with whom to be friends—at least outwardly; that I must pay the attention everybody else did to Louise de Querouaille, laugh with Mrs. Gwyn, induce their Royal Highnesses to accept me, be on familiar terms with Lady Sunderland, Lady

Frances Villiers, Lady Arlington, Lady Falmouth, Lady Suffolk, Lady Norwich,[1] the Duchess of Buckingham—I jot down a few names as they occur to me. I must win the poor neglected Queen's heart if I could. I must, at the same time, associate as required with Catherine Sedley, Moll Kirke, fit myself for the virtuous airs of Mrs. Blagge, prepare for the patronage of Lady Hamilton (once Frances Jennings, Sarah's sister—and of Sarah herself, that forward chit!) smilingly view the wild ways of Lady Mary Mordaunt and Lady Elizabeth Felton, ingratiate myself with that powerful old maid Katherine Crofts, sister of Lord Crofts, Monmouth's guardian in youth, as she herself had been governess, who had her rooms at Whitehall and was much in the King's confidence.

But this is a list that could be continued for ever; I can merely add that I was fortunate in coming into public life a year or two after the famous Duchess of Cleveland had been obliged to give up her post of lady of the Bedchamber to the poor little Queen. She made brilliant appearances still with some frequency, but at least we were not living under the same roof!

I was never on intimate terms with her successor the Duchess of Portsmouth, but she was an altogether different type of woman: her manners were in accordance with her birth, which Barbara Castlemaine's most certainly were not! and we lived, outwardly, in peace and some sort of friendship. That Charles loved her after a fashion, from the time of her coming to Whitehall for the second time, after "Madame's" death, in the early seventies, till he himself died in 1685, there is no doubt whatever. That she had to submit to extraordinary humiliations at the hands of

[1] The Scottish ex-actress.

Mrs. Nelly is also sure, for I myself was witness to several of the scenes alluded to in History, when the great lady, secure in her birth, breeding, title, enduring good looks, was literally routed horse and foot by the quick wit—which, I confess, was unspeakably funny but recognised no bounds whatever—of the ci-devant actress and orange-girl. Sometimes one did not know which way to look! partly from the devastating plainness of the latter's speech, partly from the fact that we at Court, good or bad, gentle or simple, were most of us entirely on Nelly's side in our inmost hearts.

Only once did I differ from her, and then she showed a wonderful restraint and good taste which made me feel warmly towards her ever after. As History tells, she threw Monmouth's birth in his face once in public, and he simply left the room without saying anything further. I was present, I waited till the general conversation had taken another turn, and then went and sat down quietly by Mrs. Gwyn, who received me with an even more mischievous glance than the Duchess of Richmond was wont to employ when quizzing me. She made room for me on the couch where she sat and met my attack before it was made.

"Ah, Mistress Stuart, you come to scold me, I see it in your eye! You are going to say 'tis a poor game to remind a man his mother was a Lucy Walter[1]; his sons may remind mine that theirs was just Nelly. S'truth, you're right."

I burst out laughing, for I had not said a word! "Well," I retorted, "I did but think she is dead, poor woman, and may be left in peace. You aspersed

1 "While I—pest on it, I am well enough,
My father was no King; but then my mother
Was not a Lucy Walter."
(*Monmouth,* an anonymous drama.)

her birth, Mrs. Gwyn, and Mrs. Walter had a pedigree as long as—as your tongue!"

Here she threw up her curly head in exact imitation of Monmouth, crinkled up her blue eyes, and fell back upon the cushions in such peals of merriment that our nearer neighbours, accustomed as they were to her vagaries, turned to look at her and me.

"I've routed his Grace!" she cried, "and now Madame Stuart hath defeated me, right, left and centre; I admit it. Oh, Madame," and her voice dropped and she bent confidentially nearer me, "you're his good friend, and after all, so am I. And I deserved your setting-down. I swear I wish her Grace of Portsmouth had the long tongue you possess—and accuse me of! We could get more fun out of our bouts then, zounds, but we could indeed! But my lord Duke called me 'ill-bred,' remember."

"Why," I returned, "did he do that?"

"Because," she retorted, bubbling over afresh, "*Because I am!*"

Here His Majesty crossed the room and leant over the back of the couch, Nelly and I rising at once.

"Nay, fair ladies, sit you down again, but let me share the jest—well, if those fine petticoats can be compressed to make room for an eavesdropper?" and he came round and seated himself between us, drawing both her and me down again, one on each side of him. "Now, Nelly, out with it."

"Lud, Sire," remarked Mrs. Ellen, glancing past him at me, whereat, of course, he turned to look at me too, "Lud, Sire, Madame Stuart was but telling me how ill-mannered I am."

"For shame," I cried. "What a fib!"

"And that I am a liar, Sire," she added impishly.

"You know 'twas not I who said it, 'twas you yourself," I vowed.

"Aye, that's a fact," remarked Nelly serenely. "So I did. Thus you see it is the truth I tell as a rule. Madame Stuart came to me with a lecture ready prepared; I was too quick for her, and told her what it was before she could get it out."

"I'll wager you did," said Charles. "Nobody ever gets a chance of speaking once you begin."

"That," said Nelly, folding her pretty white hands meekly, "is a pity, because I have schooled myself *so* long not to interrupt the King, nor to begin a conversation, nor to hazard a remark should he be silent, nor to call my soul my own, should he say it was his!"

Now this was a two-edged jest. We all laughed, but I felt its sharpness. *She* did not care, *Charles* did not care, but *I* did—I cared for both their sakes. But I was new to Court then.

There was another scene a few days later of which I have full remembrance—I know not quite how it came about, but I was spending a happy hour in one of the more distant and least frequented State rooms examining a caseful of miniatures. I had been attracted by one of the Duke of York, with the haunting sadness of expression his earlier portraits show, especially the one I consider the best of all, Sir Peter Lely's at St. James's Palace, and then I had passed on to Master Cooper's "limning in little" of His Majesty, and dismissed it in disgust,[1] only to fall entranced beneath the spell of the same artist's unfinished study of his Grace of Monmouth as a little boy. I recollect drawing in my breath as I looked, and my eyes suddenly and foolishly filling with tears.

[1] The really fine Samuel Cooper of Charles is at Goodwood, and forms the frontispiece to this book; the Windsor one I cannot bear.

There sounded a footstep, a curtain parted and fell to again, and Monmouth himself entered the room almost at my side, and was by me before I could lay the frame down, glancing with amusement first at what I held and then at me—amusement giving way to a dawning astonishment as my silly tears overflowed and ran down my cheeks.

"Madame!" he said, on a little remonstrating note, "*tears?*"

I was fairly caught, and I was not going to plunge myself into further folly by excuses.

"Yes, sir," I answered, "tears for the past, I think."

My sudden acquaintanceship — friendship — with Monmouth had proved slightly disappointing, but not surprisingly so to me. That gay dance at Whitehall seemed to have begun and ended our comradeship—we had not met again before our mutual transference to Windsor. I had seen him from my windows pass in and out of his fine house, surrounded by his servants, attended by gilt calash and finely decorated sedan chair, accompanied by friends or gentlemen-in-waiting. I had encountered him in the Castle, had had my hand kissed with a laughing word or two, and he had come —and gone—a butterfly flitting from flower to flower, pursuing some beckoning hand, flying after some sport or other, entangling himself in some mischief, full of the preparations for the mimic siege, riding, driving, dancing, laughing. "The whirling years!" How fast they went, when one looks back at them from days that seem to stand still!

He had half a dozen "love" affairs on hand, he was Captain of the Guard and had many duties that History always forgets,[1] he was the King's beloved

[1] People ignore the fact that he was once Commander-in-Chief (Captain-General), and a study of his military correspondence preserved in the Record Office shows how seriously he took his duties, and how thoughtful he was for his men. There were, undoubtedly, two Monmouths.

son, and there was hardly a man but paid court to him, hardly a woman not waiting for him to lift a finger. And when he came into the Room of the Miniatures I doubt not that he was in search of some one—certainly not of *me!* Yet, having found me, he stayed.

"Madame," he said again and stopped, taking the portrait from my hands, and looking down at it as if it were the likeness of a stranger, "do not think me curious, but why weep over this youngster?" We both smiled then, if my smile were rather tremulous.

"I was not thinking of you," I replied. "May I speak the truth, and you will not be hurt? I was thinking how I could have borne to part with you if you had been my son and they had taken you from me."

For a moment I feared I had gone too far. He looked neither at me nor the miniature, but out of the window, over green meadows intersected by a winding blue ribbon of river, and said slowly, "I do not think my mother did bear it. I know so little, His Majesty will never speak of her. You—*you* remembered that old dance, and of course you understood that she taught the King and me—when I was no older, nay, when I was much younger than I was then." (He tapped the glass of the Cooper portrait.) "She had that painted when she and I were last in London together, and sent it to the King. After that . . . the King sent for me." He paused and looked out of the window again.

The soft shallow hazel eyes, the eyes of some young god of the mountains and woods that lives for the joy of life and knows nothing of the possession of heart or soul, clouded for an instant. Then he turned to me.

"The past is the past," and his gay smile came

back. "She is at rest wherever she is"—here was a slight shrug not quite as careless as it looked—"and I, Madame, there is nothing to shed tears for now concerning *me!*"

He laughed, and looked to see me laugh too. So he saw me laugh (I had learnt the unwritten law, "No long faces at Court") and I said as gaily as he, "No, my lord Duke, but remember I was not weeping over the present when you caught me!"

"A pest upon your lords and dukes!" he said, with a sudden very swift shake of his head sideways —another trick I was to know. "You're mighty stiff with me, my cousin, and——" he paused and regarded me with a mimic frown—"you have been listening to tales of my sins? Now sit you there, I keep you standing," and I was drawn to the deep seat of the window. "Sit you there, and I'll sit me here"—he took the opposite corner—" and I'll prove to you I'm not so black as our fair Duchess Frances has painted me, nor Nelly, eh? nor even His Majesty. But have you"—he lowered his voice dramatically—"have you conversed with my good uncle of York? For HE . . . !"

"Sir," I said, trying not to smile, "indeed I have, but not of you. His Highness was kind enough to ask my Stuart parentage and that of my late husband, and I told him."

"And?" echoed Monmouth, alert for a jest.

"And?" I said. "Why, that was all, sir. I do not think his Highness had anything more to say."

Monmouth burst into a roar. "I warrant he had not!" he cried. "Except that I marvel he did not ask you his questions all over again! That is a clever plan to make a little conversation go a long way."

"Is it?" I asked, as if feeling for knowledge. "Yet even then it does not go far, surely?" Monmouth smiled at me, his whole face gay and entirely clear of

all sad memories, his whole bearing full of joyous, inconsequent, careless youth.

"No, I do not say much as a rule; I leave it to people like His Majesty to talk—or my wife!—or—I think, cousin, I shall leave it to you, or that monstrous plain girl with ever so bright a wit at your lodgings, Mrs. Villiers. Egad, she's amusing. She knows more of war than many men. She has told me what I never knew myself about the Maestricht fight!"

"She's admirably clever," I returned, "but her companion has begun to interest me more; that other girl has a great fascination for me."

"My lady Wentworth," said Monmouth carelessly. "I have never noticed her."

He leant his beautiful cheek, ruddy and brown, against the brown of the window-frame, he was in riding-dress, a buff coat, a shortened peruke, long boots of soft leather, his felt hat cast carelessly on a gilt settee near by. He pursed up his lips idly and whistled a few bars of our Dutch dance. "And so your name is Stuart, and has always been? mine is Scott—be damned to it!" The first part of this sentence was in a pleasant conversational tone, the second very serious, the third came with a rush, and was so inexpressibly funny that I buried my face in my hands and rocked a little back and forth. "Ah, now you laugh at me, like my father," he said, with a pretended pout—he might have been the boy of the miniature.

"No, never at you, always with you," I replied. "So you must laugh too."

"Yes, I will do that," he responded. "Ask me anything, my merry lady, in the way of mirth,[1] and you will find me ready, I'll warrant you."

[1] "Melancholy was never my greatest fault" (Monmouth to Spence).

"Not tears?" I asked, half waywardly, thinking of how he had lately caught me.

"Not tears, no—and over a portrait of myself, too! I'll give you more to cry over than that before I have done with you."

He was on his feet, pretending to frown, pretending to threaten. I leaned sideways against my half of the casement and laughed up at him.

"No doubt you will, sir!" I said.

MEN AND WOMEN

CHAPTER VI

MEN AND WOMEN

"Our Lady of Laughter, invoked in no psalter,
Praise be to thee, then, from a hag-ridden age!"
SWINBURNE'S *Nell Gwyn.*

OTHER glimpses of those past days remain with me, for the most part trivial incidents no historian save Pepys, who wrote, like me, for his private satisfaction! would have dreamt of recording.

Yet because I try to recollect what happened not to make a book of what I write, I append these scattered, disjointed records, simply for the reason that I recall that they took place. Monmouth's fine house, as I have said, was not far from mine, nor was Mrs. Ellen's lodging; the Duchess of Portsmouth was established in the Castle. One day, however, the weather, which had been delightful, fine, dry, and warm, broke in heavy showers, and the road was a running torrent of mud. I was used to the country; I was free that day, and had been amusing myself by wandering in company with a gentleman, whose acquaintance I had lately made, among the quaint old shops of the town.

Mr. Sidney was a man who made an hour pass pleasantly. I took him as I found him, and the enjoyable acquaintanceship formed at Windsor endured till after my exile in Holland, where he was too much William's friend, as all the world knows. Uncle to my lord Sunderland, but only a year older, the reputed lover of Madame de Sunderland, and

certainly affiché with several other lovely ladies, Henry Sidney, afterwards Lord Romney, was then an ally of mine, and always a delightful companion. Extremely good looking, without many brains, he was yet a charming conversationalist. I never trusted him out of my sight; I misliked the Sidney tepidity where loyalty was concerned—or worse, to wit, Colonel Algernon's republicanism!—but Henry was no Algernon, nor Robert, nor that ineffective head of the family, Leicester; he had some of the charm and none of the spite of his very much older sister "Sacharissa"; and when I add that his aunt was the fair and notorious Lucy Percy, Lady Carlisle, in the days of King Charles the Martyr, I have introduced him fully!

He and I, having a taste in common for curios, were indulging it that afternoon in wandering among the enticing shops. I had to content myself with looking, but he was amusingly extravagant, and, indeed, I at last left him within one, protesting I should succumb too and be ruined, or be shut up with him alone at the closing of the shop at night if he dallied longer. "That being the case, sir, we had better *part friends!*" I had added jestingly. (If it is found that my conversation becomes a trifle free for modern ideas, let it be recalled that I was now a member of the Restoration Court, and such a mode of speech was universal.) We had parted friends, therefore! exchanging our habitual quips, the shopman smiling and bowing at intervals, Harry Sidney's golden curls, bright grey eyes, and features clear-cut as a cameo, shown up against the darkness of the background.

"Ha, Madame, you leave me to my fate! Will you visit me in a debtor's prison? Give me at least that hope,"—and I had gone on my way through the gleaming wet streets, with the finish of a smile on my lips slowly dying out.

Ere I could reach my door, by came two magnificent coaches. One contained the Duchess of Portsmouth and a couple of gentlemen, her impassive beauty visible through the new-fangled glass windows—indeed, her equipage seemed nearly all glass and gilding—but she either never noticed me on my humble way, simply clad in a grey lawn gown and a light-weight grey "atlas" hood, or else she did not think it worth her while to recognise me. The gay coach wheels, splashing over the muddy stones, sent a shower of mire over my feet, to my natural annoyance; I drew farther back as the next coach came by. In it was one figure alone—petite, fair, a study of picturesque untidiness and impudent gaiety—Mrs. Nell!

Again a shower of mud fell over me, like a spray, soaking my modest but fresh summer dress. This time, however, I was not passed unseen, the curly head was thrust from the window, the clear gamine voice cried an order to the manservants, prefaced, I fear, by an oath I had heard behind my mask at the Playhouse!

"Madame Stuart, pig that I am to turn your pathway into a sty! I vow I've ruined your pretty gown; devil take my louts, they think they can splash in the gutter as if they still played in it—like me!" and Nelly was on the step of the coach and out upon the be-mired cobbles, in white silk shoes and violet velvet skirts, if you please, all anyhow in the mud!—brushing down my sober grey draperies with a wisp of lace handkerchief.

"Rot the fools, you're a walking mud-pie! Here, in with you, and I'll whirl you home in no time. I will not be responsible for your getting any dirtier!" and then she suddenly stopped, and looked at me with a hesitation quite frank and quite loveable. "That is, Madame, if you will do me the honour to share my coach and be seen with me in it?"

What was she not before she became Charles's mistress, but was she anything afterwards but his faithful lover? Nothing, I will stake my soul. It was he who was unfaithful to her: "as all the world knew, she made but a drawn game of it with the Frenchwoman"; she was "the indiscreetest and wildest creature that ever was in a Court"; but she was better than most of us. As I already knew, she had a heart of gold, where many had no hearts at all, she was the most natural, genuine, true soul I ever came in contact with.

"Mrs. Gwyn," I answered, "this mud has kindly blotted out that cast on me by her Grace of Portsmouth just now, and I'm grateful! As for your coach, forsooth, do you think that what is good enough for His Majesty to ride in will not do for me?" and I climbed the high steps. She followed.

"That being so, Madame Stuart," she said, quite serious still, "will you go a step farther down into the gutter, and return with me to my house for a while? It would please me very much—and—and you could not be more soiled by such contact than you are already!" And here we both smiled.

"Nay, but it's good of you," she insisted. "You receive the likes of me to please Charles when Charles is by—*eh, you have to!* But you could have gone on to-day with your head in the air, regardless of my mud and my oaths just now—do I not know it? I shall not harm you, Madame. I know your reputation (as, la! you know mine!) and oddsbody, it will survive an hour in my company. And I'll never have it said of me that I served a lady such a filthy trick—'tis a pretty lawn truly, French?—yes, and you shall at least be returned to your lodging clean."

So I spent the rest of that afternoon with the orange-girl, while my dress was being laundered afresh, wrapped in one of her beautiful undress gowns of

sky-blue muslin veiled in lace, most unbefitting my "third mourning," my demure hood laid aside, sippinng ratafia and nibbling sweet cakes. I had not been there half an hour when in came Harry Sidney![1] and I really do not know which of us laughed most, my hostess or I, at his start of surprise, admirably covered at once, or he himself when he saw he was detected.

"I left you, sir," I said, "on the verge of ruin."

"You find Madame," put in Nelly, "over the verge! I have soused her in muck from head to heels, and now she has sunk so far into the slough——" Here I interrupted: "Not of Despond, at all events!" and we all three proved the truth of that statement. We were laughing and talking at once like foolish children, when the door opened and in came the King, absolutely alone, unannounced, in a simple riding dress, with a spaniel under his arm.

"Why," he said, looking round at each one of us, "at least I do not find you all weeping in my absence, or fighting because I am not here to keep order; but rather in the best of spirits, thinking me well out of the way." He walked over and stood with his back to the fireplace. "Well, my ladies, well, Harry, my friend! Are you the leading rattlepate, or is it Nell?—it generally is!—or can I believe that Madame Stuart"—the dark eyes beamed ever so kindly on me—"is the ringleader? Gad! Frances said she wanted cheering, but that she would cheer us all in return in time."

"How can I but be gay when you're all so kind to me?" I asked; under the surface of my light-hearted manner I was deeply touched.

"Ah!" cried Nell, quick as lighting, "but we are

[1] After I had written this, I found he was one of the four executors of Nell Gwyn's will.

always kind to those who are kind to us," and she looked archly at the two men. Charles smiled benignantly down upon her; she was always to him the pet plaything, he was certain of good spirits and good company with her; but there was more than that to it, for he knew well she was as true as steel all through, and God knows he found little enough of that truth in the company about him.

Mr. Sidney cocked a handsome, strongly marked eyebrow, and said, with a heavy sigh, "Yes, yes, *we*'re always kind, but people are not always kind to *us*. Now Mrs. Gwyn is cold as ice to her humble servant," ("Why, Harry, that's good for you and better hearing for me," sotto voce from His Majesty!) "and Madame Stuart abandoned me to the claws of a rascally merchant."

"You abandoned me to be bound to the chariot-wheels of Mrs. Gwyn," I exclaimed, "a less cruel fate."

"No," amended Nelly, twinkling at Charles, "I did not follow in her Grace of Portsmouth's road."

"T'other way about, for sure," said Harry Sidney to me behind his hand. So, after the manner of our time, did we skim thin ice that summer's day.

The rain had cleared away, the glorious sun poured into the brilliantly furnished, untidy room. Mrs. Ellen's magnificent hat, smothered with a profusion of ostrich feathers, was cast carelessly on a couch, an exquisite embroidered scarf that she had worn over another, a chair held a child's toy.

"Why, Sire, won't you sit?" she asked the King as he stood still with his back to the vacant fireplace regarding us. "That is, if one can find you a seat; it doesn't seem easy, does it?"

I swept back the folds of my flowing muslins and laces, and boldly made room on my sofa. Without more ado he took his place beside me. Nelly was

scolding Mr. Sidney for his somewhat ungentle removal of her finery to a table, and the two were laughing over the mud-stain discovered where the end of her scarf had trailed. I seized the opportunity and leant towards the King. How clearly I see him now. The room had windows both at front and back, running the depth of the house; the evening sun flooded in and struck behind us, outlining with brilliant gold his great black peruke and the thin line of his olive cheek, sending a ray through the iris of the eye next me, showing the deep brown, as of darkest peat-water —those cynical, sad, kind, clever eyes of which I came to know every change of expression.

"All so kind, Sire," I repeated, as if we had never dropped the subject, "and I never thank any one, it seems to me, but Frances, and she will not let me."

"But I," said Charles, with the ghost of a glance across the room at Mrs. Gwyn, "thank *you*. Hush," as I tried to speak, "you must let me do that."

"You, Sire," I replied with a little break in my voice, "must never thank me for anything at all. I owe you too much ever to be able to repay."

"So," he said, and his voice was solemn, but his eyes danced as they met my own, "So *this* is a sort of repayment?"

"I vow it is not!" I cried hotly. "When I try, if ever I get the chance of repaying you, it will not be by accepting kindness from one . . ."

"From one who is too kind to me, eh?" asked Charles with a little sigh. "Nay, you were not going to say that, I know. But let that be. Thank me when you have something to thank me for."

"Well, then, this past three weeks, for example!" I exclaimed gaily. "How many of your faithful subjects would not cut off their right hands for a month with the Court at Windsor? And only because——"

"Because you are a Stuart," said His Majesty, looking at me from under his heavy brows. "Ah, believe me, I know that those who bear that name have much owing to them—I should know, should I not? And since I do (*when* I remember, you notice), I occasionally try to make reparation to those who are the King's cousins for their sins!" My foolish tears, always far too near the surface, rushed into my eyes. "Why, it's a crying matter, is it?" said Charles. "This is serious. First James makes you weep—oh, I heard of your tears over his miniature; James tells me more than you think!—and now——"

At that moment came the beating of little hands on the door—half-closed, it flew open, and into the room ran a beautiful little boy looking at least five or six years, though I knew he was but a little over four, and precipitated himself upon Nelly's violet velvet lap. She bent over his dark curls, her own fair locks forming a charming contrast.

"Charles, we've forgotten our manners!" she cried, raising him and turning him right round towards the sofa where His Majesty and I sat. The small boy laid a hand on his heart, executed so deep a bow that his long curls tumbled over the top of his head and touched the floor, and then, a trifle red in the face, came forward and kissed our hands most charmingly. He looked up at me and then at the King.

"Dis is de lady," he said with a pretty lisp, "whose down is in de titchen bein' *wossed*. I've been helpin'."

"We can't keep away from the petticoats." Another of Charles's sotto voce comments passed unheeded for once, as I was gazing into the beautiful brown upturned eyes.

"Oh!" I said; and, "Oh, the Cooper miniature!"

Across the room, Henry Sidney's easy, smiling

glance caught mine, and changed ever so little as he looked from the boy's face to me, and then, swift as thought, to the King and away again. This was Nelly's eldest son, then, but it might have been Monmouth as Samuel Cooper saw him twenty years before; and Harry Sidney was brother to the man who, the world whispered, was Monmouth's father! I found myself involuntarily throwing apart my hands with a small quick gesture, at once restrained, induced by the mental resolve to "give it up." Truly there were riddles in this great world beyond my reading!

"Madame's down is nearly dri-éd," volunteered the little voice, and I rose somewhat hastily, picking up his small person and bestowing him upon my seat, dropping for one moment on my knees on the floor before him, and holding up my face for a kiss. The King sat and smiled at us both.

"Charles," he said, "when you're my age fair ladies won't pick you up and then proffer you kisses, I'm afraid. Give her a very nice one!" and a sound, fat, somewhat *damp* smack saluted my cheek.

"Madame's face is wet," remarked the smaller Charles, (my idiotic tears!) but the King said instantly, "You must help dry it; you helped dry her gown," and put into the little plump hand a beautiful laced kerchief, with which the boy seriously and methodically dabbed first one cheek of mine and then the other.

"It doesn't come off—no red!" he remarked, looking at the kerchief, and then at all four of us as we simultaneously burst out laughing!

"No, no," added His Majesty. "Madame Stuart can't wear red till she begins to give over weeping about our sins, Charles."

"Sins?" said the drier of my gown and my tears, "what is sins?"

"I wonder?" echoed the King, still laughing.

"The things other people tell us not to do, and then do themselves," hazarded Nell, turning with me as I made for the door with, "May I be excused? I must get into my rightful drab attire again. I have taken up too much of everybody's time."

"That was made for slaves," said my Sovereign, nodding at me as we went to the door. "It has nothing to do with slave-drivers like me, so address your apologies elsewhere, as your thanks, my cousin."

"Have you been thanking him?" whispered Mrs. Gwyn, catching up her violet velvet skirts to ascend the stairs to her room, where I had shed my draggled plumage and now was to don it refreshed. "He won't like it, or at least he'll say he don't; but all the world asks favours of him and throws him back no gratitude"—"oh, none! But if you're going to be grateful, Madame, why"—she paused, and looked at me with a curious expression, still smiling, but the expression was there behind the smile—"why, I'm old-fashioned, and I thank him too. He took me out of the gutter."

"Just as you did me," I smiled.

"Ah, but with a difference. Well, that must be; you're a lady, and he's only a king."

The sinking sun gilt her curly head as she stood by the toilette table—my grey lawn, clean, newly ironed, was laid out on the beautiful great silver-adorned bed. I turned from it to her at that last sentence, and she held up a little white hand at me as she saw my face. "Oh, you do not take me aright; you do not understand, and I thought you did. Gadzooks, but how should you?"

"But how should I not?" I cried with a tiny stamp of my foot. "It is just because I do understand, cannot you see? What if I'm a lady, does

that count for much? I'm a Stuart, and the King's a Stuart—let's have done with ladies and gentlemen!"

"We'll have done with fine ones," said Nell; "but he's a gentleman and you're a lady, and I'm of the mud in the kennel—there's the truth."

"Nelly," I said, and she glanced up swiftly at my face and let her eyes fall again, "the King and I are in the mud with you. Don't let us bandy words. We're all human beings, and some of us are bad and some of us are good, and History will make a fine mess of us when it comes to write us down. Why, it will say that you were for ever laughing, and you're very solemn now, and that the King was always ungrateful, whereas Heaven above knows, how kind he is; and History will say you were bad, and the King was bad, and I say to you now that History will never know! For it's only those who know the King will be able to tell posterity what sort of man he was, and it's only those who love the King who know him!"

"And we who love him," replied Nell, "will never set it down! I?—I cannot so much as write my own name. But you, Madame, will you tell them some day—some day when we're all dead and buried and gone to the Hell they promise us or the Heaven we hope for—even me!—that you knew Charles and loved him, and can tell people that he was not so black as—as old Peter Lely paints him!" (her merriment rang out afresh) "and that, if you think they'll care to hear, if the gutter-girl was too careless with her mud, why she had it washed off again when she could." She held up my spotless gown. "That's clean. And I trust you, when you write The History of your Times like good Parson Burnet, a pillar of my Church who will never have a decent word to say of me (you'll see!) to tell people

you knew Nelly, and that she was not as black as the mud she threw at you! Promise."

It is not in vindication of my word that I write now. I don't think I promised her anything, for I put my arms round her and kissed her. I look back to all those other fair women, virtuous, some of them, and frail, others, who were my friends, and kisses did not fly between us as a rule. But I kissed Nelly, and I tell you that as I did it, I am thankful I felt meek enough, wise enough, to be glad—not that I gave the kiss, but that she took it.

Laced into the grey lawn afresh, my sober hood donned, Henry Sidney escorted me back to my lodgings a few minutes later.

We met Monmouth on the doorstep!

"I come to wait on you and you are from home!" cried that spoiled darling of the Court in indignant remonstrance.

Harry Sidney and I went off into peals of laughter. "Oh sir, oh sir!" I said, (of course *he* was laughing too). "Am I never to stir abroad? I was not aware your Grace ever intended to honour my humble abode, yet I see, of course, that I should have sat at home always in hope."

"Your monstrous sharp tongue!" said Monmouth, amusedly.

"Sharp?" I cried. "Of a certainty. I've been polishing it most of the afternoon at Mr. Sidney's expense. Do I cut, sir?"

"Madame, you've been blunt with me—bluntly frank, that is," smiled Beau Sidney. "Our friend here would be the better of a little sharpening, perhaps." And he bowed and was gone.

Nothing could annoy Monmouth, anyhow. "Sidney thinks he's so clever," he said reflectively, gazing

after the departing exquisite, "and he is not. Now I know I am not."

"Oh, sir, who told you that terrible lie?" I cried.

"His Majesty, I should say, about three times daily; but Madame, if you call the King a liar to me, I must take steps——"

"Take these, you silly boy!" I cried, out of all patience, catching him by the arm and giving him a little push up the stairs to my lodgings. "Come within and try my tea,[1] and tell me why you waited on me, and for me."

"I came because I wanted to see you, why else?" smiled Monmouth, hat in hand, standing back to let me enter my withdrawing-room. "Why else do I ever go to see a lady?" This was too much for me, it was so absolutely true. We all seemed to be playing parts then, but once and again I saw these people who became so dear to me in the clear light of their own frank statements, and of those trivial times the memory stays clearer than it might have remained at tremendous crises in the history of the day—but did not. Herein lies the great fault of these reminiscences. I write to you of men and women, not of princes and politics, crowns and kingdoms—just human beings, such as I was myself, such as I still am.

He leaned back in my most lordly chair, a glowing figure in my modest lodging, brave in his uniform—there had been a rehearsal that morning before the storm, of the Maestricht mimic fight, and he was in the full dress, the fine battle array of those days, when great courtiers and commanders took the field in the most brilliant colours and gold, glittering armour and magnificent horse-trappings and camp furniture.

[1] I was well used to this increasingly modish beverage, as I had had it sent me from Holland for several years.

He leaned back and he smiled! He had the rare gift of being absolutely silent at times, restless creature, if not talkative, as he was. My woman brought tea and a little modest confectionery—not half so extravagant as Nelly's ratafia and sugared cakes!—and I, who had spoiled my appetite, plied him with what I had to offer, (he laughed, and vowed he indulged but seldom in so intoxicating a draught!) and would not let him wait on me, as, with his ever charming manners, he tried to do, but insisted on serving him myself. The sun was just going down. Outside the windows a blue evening, one of those rare summer nights that make one feel as if one were inside a great sapphire, had set in, the air clear-washed by the rain, the whole earth sweet. His Grace helped himself to another cake and remarked, "So, Madame, we are not to lose you?"

"Lose me?" I asked bewildered. "You have had me here for three weeks, and by His Majesty's gracious invitation I believe I stay out the month and see your great siege (which will be rare sport)! After that I go back into my obscurity again and live on my gay memories."

Monmouth smiled afresh. "Why, yes, cousin, if you call Whitehall your 'obscurity!' "

I jumped, literally; certainly I did nothing else, unless a little gasp counts.

"Oh, aye," he continued, "have you not heard? Gad! that's like the King. You say you've been in his company at Mrs. Nell's and he said no word. Ah, he was afraid of being thanked!"

"So Mistress Gwyn said," I cried, "and the King bade me withhold my gratitude till I had something to thank him for."

Monmouth laughed aloud once more. "Again, so like him. You have now; at least I trust you will think so. His Majesty was talking over certain

matters with Will Chiffinch only last night—I was present. They settled your future lodging for you, if you will have it (and may I say I hope you will?) There is room, poor enough, I fear, and none too large, but 'twill suit a lady for bedroom and withdrawing room, be she"—he looked roguishly at me —"of no exacting tastes. It is part of that portion of the Palace set aside for Their Majesties' sempstresses. These wenches require a nominal (merely nominal) overseer; and if you would deign to accept the post, which carries with it a nominal (merely nominal) salary, why, cousin, we should have you under our roof and always with us. The Queen hath remarked the exquisite lace you work upon when sitting in your usual quiet corners! and the Duchess of Richmond hath given a rare account of your stitchery; she saith your petticoats are all of your own workmanship, and made Mme. de Portsmouth quite vexed t'other night by her detailing of their beauties—before the King and me? Oh, but we're *quite* used to petticoats, Madame," and he bit a piece out of the cake and looked at the crescent-shaped space his fine teeth had left, with a wickedly discreet expression.

I had so much to say I did not know where to begin. I stammered, and then stopped, and began again. "Sir," I said, "then indeed I have much to thank the King for, the Duchess of Richmond, and *perhaps*"—I looked at him—"my kinsman 'His Grace my Lord General the Duke of Monmouth'?"

"My Lady Mistress of the Sewing-Maids," said Monmouth, leaning forward in his chair, with a hand on either arm, and the dying light shining on his young, sweet-tempered, loveable beauty. "Do you not think—may I suggest it—that as you will soon be so occupied in future, 'James' will save time when you address me?"

There was a scratch at the door, the key turned, and Henrietta Wentworth stood in the doorway, slender, elegant, simply but tastefully attired in a fresh printed calico gown, her entry suddenly checked by the realisation of whom I had with me, her pale cheeks growing white, her tawny eyes darkening to black as her pupils dilated. She bit her lip. "Your pardon, indeed, Madame. I was unaware——" She curtsied to Monmouth and made as if to withdraw.

He was up out of his chair, one swift movement and he caught the door as she tried to draw it to. "Nay, Mistress," he said, "I was on the point of departure. I have but come to tell Madame some news I thought might please her! We are to have more of Madame's company when we return to town, Lady Henrietta. She will be at Whitehall in future, and, with you at St. James's, the life to come holds some sunshine!" and he bowed with the same easy grace with which he spoke the compliment.

She looked at me, never once at him, though I, after one sight of her face, kept my eyes away from hers. I knew, though she had not guessed I knew, the court he had paid to Eleanor Needham, among the Duchess of York's ladies, all that year, and I knew from his own lips he had never taken any notice of this light, white-faced girl with the eyes that darkened with suppressed emotion at the sight of him; and I, what was I to prove? a rival, an enemy, one of those clever women who had much to do with public affairs, their day of gallantry being over?—a nonentity tucked away in a corner of the King's great house?—an intimate friend and relation of His Majesty's?—a guide, philosopher, and counsellor of this fascinating, wayward, wicked boy?

She did not know, she was to find out later; she tried, at that moment, to efface herself entirely and was not allowed. Monmouth, with his characteristic

lack of tact, for which in after years I once shook him, literally! reiterated that he was about to go, kissed our hands, and went, leaving my little room the dimmer for the removal of his presence.

Lady Wentworth turned quickly to me and spoke on an abrupt note. "Again I ask your pardon, I believed you disengaged. Mrs. Villiers is in attendance on the Duchess to-night, and hath so cruel a headache I have taken upon myself to consult you, Madame Stuart. She is not fit to quit her chamber. I have not the Duchess's confidence as she hath; I hardly like to take it upon myself to send a messenger or suggest a substitute. There is a page below, and should I send him, or would you of your goodness write a billet and say you think Mrs. Villiers too unwell?"

"Let me come down to her," I said without further ado, "and then I'll take it upon myself to restrain her. I am bidden to Her Majesty's basset-table, and if, Lady Wentworth, you are commanded instead of Mrs. Villiers, will you come with me? Bid Mrs. Villiers let me see her for a moment; perhaps 'tis only an ordinary headache."

"She suffers from them," answered Henrietta, "oftener than she will admit. She studies still, and has a heavy correspondence. I think it naught but over-fatigue."

"There are worse aches," I remarked, as we went downstairs. "Heart-ache, for example."

"Heart-ache must be hard to bear," said, bravely, this daughter of ruined Cavaliers, with a firm voice, as we arrived at the maids-of-honour's rooms and asked Elizabeth's admittance.

"It is," I replied, as her woman let us in.

As I anticipated, the messenger came back from

the Castle excusing Mrs. Villiers's attendance, and commanding Lady Wentworth's instead. She was at the door of her room on the ground floor when I descended from above on the arrival of our sedans, her girlish figure, tall and straight as a golden ear of wheat on its golden stem, in a pale tawny silk, softly shimmering of surface, with one great jewel on the breast, a cross of square dark red stones, heavily set in enamelled gold with whole pearls in the Tudor fashion, an heirloom. An old type of dress, certainly, but one in which she looked very young. She had but few gowns, but they were most attractive, and unlike those of the other maids. That silk had been brought from Holland's great Oriental bazaars. In time to come, not only the Lady Mary as Princess of Orange, but Eliza Villiers as her lady-in-waiting, were to go a-buying there, and, still farther in the future, Henrietta and myself! It narrows life to a point sometimes, such a recollection—a sharp point.

Nobody reckoned her a beauty then, but I admired her always. I loved her almond-shaped eyes, so much darker than her hair, which was not of a fashionable shade, but a truly lovely one. I liked her clear transparent pallor, and a certain air of the old days about her. Henrietta Wentworth was dubbed old-fashioned, but she brought to me always the ancient romantic Cavalier atmosphere; always I thought of her when I remembered that exquisite verse:

> "My dear and only love, I pray
> This little world of thee
> Be governed by no other sway
> Than purest monarchy."

There was about her just a touch of the Great Marquess's lofty grandeur, the fine soul, the air of high aim and direct purpose. With it, I suppose, there was an admixture of Dutch self-control and

patience—a queer mixture, I thought, Wentworth and Cary blood with a dash of Spanish! (so they said). No, Henrietta Baroness Wentworth was not quite like other young girls at King Charles's Court.

I want to say at once that she was a woman of her time for all that, Lady Wentworth held her own and took her place. She had admirers—indeed, several suitors for her hand—but I (who guessed her secret early) saw how well she managed them, how steadfastly she set her face towards her ultimate goal, with what wonderful patience and tact for so young a girl, still in her teens, *she did nothing at all* while she waited for my lord Duke to turn to her. She never had the wild high spirits, real or assumed, of so many of us, she seldom of her own freewill joined in the raillery, and the daily flint-striking-steel of wit meeting wit, and laughter, laughter, did not often include her. The King always appreciated her, even if he, too, did very little—he was careful never to single her out as being one of his especial favourites (that, too, I soon noticed); the Duke of York began by liking her too, and was long before he discovered how cordially she detested him! the poor little insignificant Queen and she were certainly good friends.

Queen Catherine liked me undoubtedly, but our relations never became intimate. I cannot say why; I tried to please and serve her in a quiet way, and I imagined that when once I was installed at Whitehall I might see her often. As a matter of fact, I saw very little of her. She made use of my services, she seemed to trust me, seemed not ill-pleased that I should be near her, she was kind and pleasant, yet she led her quiet retired life and I mine so small a distance apart, that I look back now and wonder how it was that we were truly apart indeed.

I cannot blame her. I blame nobody.

In that life of mine I strove—and I strive still—

to accuse none of those I knew of the heinous crimes for which they were fond of calling each other to account! In all the literature of the period bitter personal partisanship rages, and it wearies me now as it wearied me then. Partisan I am myself in one matter only: I believe Charles II was rather the saviour of England during the stormy twenty-five years of his reign than her ruin. The means he employed I do not judge; I have tried to judge by results. I know what my opinion of the public men of his day was, and I have not changed it.

And of Monmouth's rights or wrongs I say no word. He was the King's son—or he was not. He was the King's legitimate son—or he was not. He was the rightful heir to the English throne—or he was not. But which he was, Sidney or Stuart, bastard or Prince, I did not know, and I do not know now. And I think I may say that if I do not, nobody does.

"Well, my friend," I remarked to myself in the glass that night, "since her Grace of Portsmouth bespattered you in the street after dinner to-day, you have got through a good deal! Where is this life going to land you in the end?"

Perhaps the strangest part of that life was the fact that it landed me exactly where it took me up, and I was left, acknowledging no king, in that England which, for my sins, I had counted as second to my two Kings.

UNDER THE ROYAL ROOF

CHAPTER VII

UNDER THE ROYAL ROOF

"He was a vicious man, but very kind to me."—Dr. Johnson.

To give an order to Mr. Chiffinch was to see that order fully carried into execution the next time you thought of it!—at least, so King Charles once told me.

A couple of rooms among the rather large collection set apart for the Royal sempstresses were suggested by the Keeper of the King's Closet as available for my use, the King agreed, bade Chiffinch have all in order for Madame Stuart on the return of the Court to town, and the thing was done. There was certainly no time to have the lodging actually finished for me in a week, but it was filled with workmen and half way to completion; meantime I took a very modest apartment not far from the Palace (entirely refusing to billet myself on the Duchess of Richmond any further, owing her as much as I did), and in a very short space of time the rooms were ready for me and my woman. Looking on to the river, giving upon one of the minor galleries, which in turn looked out into the open air, these two rooms, panelled from floor to ceiling, were reduced in size (it was all Chiffinch's planning) by a slice, as it were, being cut off them by the erection of a thin but sound-proof panelled division, running along their entire length, so that in the space between them and the corridor there was room for a small ante-chamber and a tiny closet for my woman.

The walls of the parlour were of beautiful old dark carving—linen-fold pattern—but the bedroom, having been newly lined, had panelling of fresh wood, which had been simply waxed, and the whole was a soft light greyish-fawn, very restful.

The ante-room, not being very light—it was merely what would now be called an entrance-hall, but was an absolute necessity, as visitors could not be shown straight in upon me—I lit with an old brass lamp originally Dutch, and merely furnished with a bench and a chair or two beside one small table, with a strip of brilliant Indian red Oriental carpet on the floor and red stuff curtains to the windows—a cosy enough little entry.

The bedroom especially pleased me. I had the small amount of furniture I still retained sent up from the country—a fine carved bed which had hangings of ancient embroidered linen toned by time to the same colour, though a paler shade, of the walls, worked delightfully with such fruit and flowers as Nature never knew in dim greens and reds. The quilt was a handsome affair of Tudor workmanship, and had belonged to my family for generations, green velvet heavily wrought in (now) dull gold and with thick long silken fringes. Over this to protect it I usually laid a lace cover of my own making, again of the soft fawn shade, in a coarse thread but elaborate stitch, the green and gold work gleaming through. The toilette-table was a lovely piece of French cabinet-making, the one armoire the room contained was of Dutch marquetry, the chairs were the plain high-backed wand-seated genre of that day. A pair of fine Spanish leather screens were part of my furniture, one plain, the other stamped and gilt, the plain one serving for the bedroom, the other the withdrawing-room. As for the dark wood floors, they were treated in the French fashion, like all those

at Whitehall, and I merely laid down on them a collection of skins, trophies of my late husband's hunting and shooting days—half a dozen or so fawn-hued deerskins in the bedroom, and in the reception room several larger and darker red deer, while I had evolved a great warm rug, almost a carpet, before the fire, out of a collection of Scottish fox pelts, of splendidly red-brown colouring.

It was idle to deny that my rooms were rather empty. I thought so as I stood, one misty grey September morning, having come round from my lodgings to settle my household stuff newly brought up from Hertfordshire.

The beautiful proportions of my reception room—quite large enough for a lonely woman of quiet habits—with the wide but low windows almost filling its outer side, deep-hued walls, ceiling, and parquet, were very pleasing to the eye, and the room was so light the dark panelling did not matter. The rich brown skins were laid on the floor, the gilded leather screen partially hid the door into the bedroom, a little cabinet-maker patronised by Frances had provided me with a really well-executed copy of the cabinet given her by the King.[1] I had another Dutch lamp, this time a copper one, of that lovely pale copper that is as light and nearly as golden as brass, also a couple of pairs of copper candlesticks. A small table in one window held in a fine antique if well-worn inlaid desk and my writing materials, and there were a couple of chairs like those in my bedroom, the cane-work of which had been lightened with gold; but I was conscious of much that lacked!—no couch, no cushions, no looking-glass ("I must borrow one of Mrs. Nelly," I said half aloud, thinking of

[1] This has been lately on view in Edinburgh, and is a beautiful piece of Jacobean work, with hearts in high relief, and enriched with ivory and tortoise-shell.

her mirror-lined room), no arm-chairs, no footstools, no pictures but a few miniatures, no—— "A great many 'noes,'" I added to myself, looking round the room. And I must get some colour into it somehow."

I got some colour into it as I spoke; there was a knock at the outer door, and my somewhat flustered maid appeared. "Oh, Madame, quality!"—followed by a gay laugh, and the further unannounced entry of my beloved sinner, Monmouth himself. He had just come from drilling his cavalry in Hyde Park, the scarlet roquelaure was still about his shoulders half hiding the gorgeous uniform. A braver figure I never saw.

"Aye, quality!" he cried gaily. "Cousin, you're welcome! Is this your public entry into Whitehall? Where are the arches and flowers and shouting mobile? For the matter of that"—he kissed the hand hurriedly slid out of an old leather gauntlet to greet him, looking half ashamed, half mocking, screwing up his face in an absolutely childish grimace as Frances sometimes did—"my own return is without blast of trumpet! As for St. James's"—he slipped out of the roquelaure and called his page, in waiting in the ante-room, to take that, his hat, and his gloves—"why, I shall pay my respects at St. James's later, a good deal later. There has been the devil's own hullabaloo."

"I know it," I said drily, serious, but with laughing eyes perforce answering his. "And you nearly swept me into your hullabaloos as a fine start-off before ever I was come to this place! James"—I dropped my gloves and laid both hands on his arm as we stood together by the window, my maid and his page effacing themselves—"see here. No, don't explain; I knew the whole story at Windsor, but others did not. I was sent for to be catechised by the Duke

of York, but he would not listen, even though he sent for me to question me." Here Monmouth and I made exactly the same face, and I shook his arm impatiently.

"A plague on you!" I cried. "You've set me down black—oh, black!—in his Highness's blackest books, and—and I did want to stand well with them both. She's like a Princess in a fairy-tale, and he, I would respect and admire him if I might. Don't stand in my way there, James."

The brown eyes looked impudently into mine, unabashed. "You see, Madame, that you have to choose already. No, not between saints and sinners: between sinners and sinners. And not between Stuart and Cromwell, eh? but between Stuart and" (he laughed shortly) "*Scott.* For whom are you going to be? James of York or James of Monmouth?"

I might have known it would come to that. I had seen a good deal during my month at Windsor!

"You order me to choose?" I said, drawing back a little, but he caught my hands, one in each of his.

"Oh, no," he smiled, "I do not order a lady. I—suggest—that she shall tell me whether she is my friend or whether she is . . . my uncle's."

"Why, I'm not your uncle's, that's a fact," I said ruefully, and we both laughed outright.

"So you'll have to be mine; what a fate! I know you can't be expected to respect and admire me, and I'm not even like a Prince out of a fairy story——"

"Oh, but you are, you are!" I interrupted, and he let the smile die from his exquisitely cut mouth.

"Yes—perhaps—since nowhere else, Madame ma cousine. Well, we won't be too sad. You look like a disguised queen!"

I glanced down at my attire, a strictly utilitarian one. "Sir," I said, "I'm settling my house; you come in unannounced, or announced as 'quality'

—descriptive (and discriminating) in Whitehall—and you catch me thus." Again I looked down at myself. I was dressed in a striped laycock petticoat, a laced-across bodice and a full smock were half hidden by a big useful apron, and my hair was tucked away in the pretty undress cap of the period, so as to be out of the dust. I do not think Monmouth and I ever presented a more marked contrast; we both realised it at the same moment.

"You, you *popinjay!*" I cried, in feigned indignation at his magnificence, "You find me all unready, and working like a scullion! Now, are you going to make it worth my while to sacrifice St. James's for you?"

Monmouth gave a laugh. "Yes, I'll do that," he said, and went to the door, leaving me by the window looking after him.

I sighed. "You will, I dare say!" I said to myself, and picked up my gauntlets. Hardly had I pulled them on again—hands must be soft and white however hard one worked at Whitehall—than he was back once more, the door of the ante-room as well as the outer entrance were flung wide, two men were carrying in a large piece of furniture, and yet another two followed, his Grace's page and my maid guarding lintels and wainscots, Monmouth looking on amused in the background. "See, Madame, I have had to rearrange my lodgings in the Cockpit, and am hard put to it to know what to do with a few odd sticks of furniture—will you of your charity give them a home?"

The odd sticks were a glorious old Elizabethan couch, of curved, high-arching back, covered with silk and wool work that had once been orange and scarlet and brightest brown, with a touch or two of pink, but which had all mellowed to a lovely mélange of apricot and rosy-gold; a square footstool on four

legs en suite; one of the new modish mirrors in an oblong tortoise-shell frame; a couple of very fine arm-chairs, beautifully carved, with the King's cypher and crown in gilt, and upholstered in russet velvet. "For His Majesty, Madame; one when he sits by your fire, one when you hold a levée in bed." On the top of all this, a heap—a literal heap—of cushions, silk and velvet, in shades of cream, apricot, orange, tawny, russet, and one flame-pink.

"I thought they would set off the couch," said their owner, with his head on one side (the man who had no taste, according to History!) and he took from his page's hand a more carefully wrapped package.

"I know the way the sun strikes through these windows, and I thought you might like the light shining on these dishes;" and then the wrappers strewed the floor suddenly, and on each sill was a large flattish bowl cut from a single piece of semi-precious stone—one of ruddy, nearly opaque cornelian, one of veined translucent, honey-coloured agate.

"Those I hate!" remarked Monmouth serenely, "I have but commanded them to be brought for your inspection, as I recalled your fondness for crystals and spars and the like. They have cunningly worked feet—look." He turned over the cornelian dish and showed me the silver-gilt base, and the four chased knobs on which it rested.

I see him thus, in all his splendour, the glorious russet and brown of his colouring, the fine slender hands that were yet strong enough to hold in any horse however unbroken, the perfect poise of the classic young figure, and the glowing red-and-gold of the bowl he held, and, looking at him I forgot to speak. He glanced up and caught my eye; I suppose I looked too solemn. Misunderstanding, he made a quick movement as if to ward off the thanks I had not yet uttered, the protests I should have made.

"They please you?" he asked. "Then 'tis more than they do me. So both parties are satisfied."

He was quite proud of what he thought was his subtle finesse, I could see! He did not know that for me thenceforward he was to remain in my mind's eyes a study in the colouring he had added that morning to my little room: all the golds and browns that hold red in them, and the auburn that lingers in darkest Stuart curls and most sombre Stuart eyes. And I wonder if the Stuarts of Scotland borrowed those tints from their own land, from the precious stones of their hills that seem but peat-water crystallised—the gold and brown stones and the gold and brown water.

Ah, how it all comes back to me! Once the King owned a trifle. When they come to bury me they will find a little packet hung round my neck on a thin gold chain, and in it one black pearl, the story of which will be told in these memoirs, a curl of black hair streaked with grey, a curl of darkest brown with just one auburn thread or two, and a little diamond-set seal of peat-water-hued cairngorm. After King Charles died, Ailesbury sent it to me. I did not quite know why. I asked him later, holding it in my hand as I was wont to do for hours, letting the light shine through the gold and the brown of it. I said, "My dear lord, how much I value this I can never tell you. I saw it so often in His Majesty's hands. But why did you part with it, and why did you give it to *me?*"

"Madame," was the answer, "it is yours. They gave it to me after his death, but——" He stopped. "I can tell you this; no more. The King wrote you a letter the night he first felt ill, one of his usual cypher letters, sealed with this agreed-upon

seal."[1] Ailesbury paused. He looked at me and his face changed, as he saw the change in mine.

"But oh, Bruce," I cried—calling him by his old name as always—"I never had the letter! Were there others too? Did he write to—to——"

"There was another to the Duke of Monmouth—that I know; a third to the Prince—to King William. You never had yours, Madame?—nor Monmouth his? —but the Prince . . ."

I got up. "Bruce, my dear," I said, "it's all over and done with. They're dead and nothing could bring them back, and so it does not matter. But my cousin James had no letter, nor had I. King William? Ask him! He will tell you as surely as —as I do not. I did not understand a great many things then, but I understand one thing now. King James was set on having the throne, and he had it. King William was set on having the throne, and he has it. So, Bruce, my dear, I have—the seal of the letter I never had, the King's last letter to me! Oh, to have been given it, Bruce! What was in it—what?"

"I did not know," he replied, shaking his head. "No, I do not know. But if we both knew now, of what use would it be?"

I shook my head in turn. "None," I said. "None." I held the cairngorm up to the light. Like sunshine slanting through the iris of a brown eye it gleamed between my fingers. "You knew I did not get that letter, nor Monmouth his?" I asked suddenly.

"I knew nothing," said Ailesbury. "There were the letters; and there is the seal. You have that."

I have that.

Some day, when Charles and I meet again in the

[1] I had not realised till then that he knew so much.

spirit-world, he will see me holding out the ghost of a little brown stone seal which closed his last letter written on earth. So, when they bury me, I want them to take the seal out of the packet over my heart, and shut it in my fingers—just to be ready, in case——!

It is all folly. The good bishop—an old friend of mine who sometimes comes to St. Albans Abbey to deliver one of his famous discourses—laughed at me, quite kindly, when I told him once what I wished done.

"But my daughter," he said, "we shall take nothing with us."

"No, my lord," I responded, "of course not. And I shall not need to talk to King Charles about such trifles as seals or letters." He laughed again, still kindly, but as if he were dealing with a child.

"You will not talk about such things at all," he said decidedly and deliberately. "And I would not think too much, Madame Stuart, of meeting again in another life his late Majesty and his unfortunate son." He stopped, because I laughed, and he thought I was going to be angry.

"No, my lord bishop," I smiled, "I will not think too much about meeting them again!" A sentence that might be taken whichever way one chose. I left him to choose. I know which way he chose to take it; for myself I know this, that wherever I go I shall meet King Charles and the Duke of Monmouth, and all the differences in our lives and our creeds will be straightened out, and all the sins of omission and commission will be expiated, and all the things we did not know be made plain, and the love we gave and the love we got will be there waiting for us, multiplied a thousand—a million-fold—all the love, and all the laughter!

That is what I believe; and the bishop believes

otherwise. One is right and the other wrong—we can but believe, and die, and go to find out.

The memory of the cornelian dish has swept me far away from the hour of its presentation! I left the Duke with it in his hands, showing me, boyishly, the details of its feet. Monmouth's preference ran to yellows and blues; he never saw himself, as I saw and see him, in the autumn-leaf colourings that to my mind made his most becoming setting. I *loved* his good looks in my parlour, among the cushions he had provided, backed by the brown linen-fold panelling, enhanced by the pale Dutch copper. His mirror I hung lengthways (it was an oblong) over my mantelpiece, bringing in a new fashion, as I found to my surprise! I hate a looking-glass hung too high; I want it to be useful, every inch of it. And my miniatures also must be where all could see them, and so were suspended on each side of the fireplace: naught of much value—family portraits none too well done, but one of Mr. Cooper's latest, just before his death, of my husband, and (before long) the copy of the Cooper portrait of Monmouth at Windsor. "You shall have something nearer the Monmouth you know than that!" remarked his Grace on seeing it, and forthwith I was bidden go to Mr. Lely and select any sketch of his I pleased, since I had said I had never yet seen an oil portrait of Monmouth that I thought a good likeness.

Lely's drawings were wonderful. I have been to Mr. Pepys's house more than once, and have turned over his collection; the King too had some beautiful examples. Sir Peter—I always forget to give him his title—drew *me* once, just a rough sketch, standing behind Frances Richmond's chair one afternoon when we were together at his studio, bending over her—

very like me, but by no means fair enough for Frances, as I told him to his face. (I would I knew where it is now!) I have a copy of the portrait of Frances by him, now at Antwerp, the only one I ever really liked of her,[1] and that denies her half her beauty. She laughed when I said so. "We really lovely people," she said cynically, "like James, and me, and Colonel Churchill, and our dear pleasant Harry" (Henry Sidney), "never receive due justice. You portrait painters score your greatest successes when you paint—shall I say His Majesty? and Arran, and the irresistible little Jermyn; and in days to come Cathie Sedley and Eliza Villiers will ravish the eyes of posterity—they don't now!" she added thoughtfully, with a sunny smile. "Think of their brains, though, sir? ah, 'tis the mind you paint and not the poor face! No wonder Madame Stuart considers that the Duke of Monmouth and the Duchess of Richmond will never show their greatest charms to future generations on canvas!"

Madame Stuart did so consider the case, and does still; nobody ever painted or modelled either the Duchess of Richmond or the Duke of Monmouth in a way which did justice to their "real loveliness."

The proximity of my rooms to the Sovereigns' apartments, modestly tucked away among the Royal sewing-maids as they were, undoubtedly puzzled many people. I do not know to this day why I was lodged there. I was under the impression that Frances Richmond engineered it, but I have wondered since whether it were not more Chiffinch's doing than hers. She may have thought I should

[1] Her portrait as Bellona is surprisingly like the Goodwood full-length of Monmouth.

make a good friend for the Queen in future (that never happened); Chiffinch may have thought that rooms so close to both his and the King's would prove useful politically. That they were so near the King undoubtedly accounted for the more frequent pleasure I had in his company than if I had been placed farther afield! As a matter of fact, Katherine Crofts and I, nearly contemporaries, and both lodged at Court with no ostensible reason, so often honoured, were only divided by the apartments of the maids-of-honour, though her rooms—really allotted to her brother, Lord Crofts—gave upon the Stone Gallery, away from the river, and mine were overlooking the water itself, to my lasting joy.

The Duchess of Richmond did not come to inspect my new dwelling till a week or two later, when all was duly in order.

"'Tis a cruel kindness to walk in upon a poor soul playing the good house-wife and disposing of her chattels," she said, when I waited upon her just before finally moving in. "I'll be with you when you are fairly ready for company. Have you had any yet, by the way?"

"No one but his Grace of Monmouth!" I laughed.

"'No one!'" mocked Frances. "And oh! that young man. I might have known. H'm, did he count your cooking pans for you, and hammer his pretty fingers hanging up your pictures? Think of the domestic side of James! but I do not doubt there is one, and more ladies than you have seen it. I hear he hath established a friend in distant Russell Street of late—have you heard?"

"Why, Duchess," I said, "I hear nothing, and what I hear I forget."

"Egad," said Frances, "you're laying up a dull future for yourself, my dear!"

"Dull at Whitehall?" I asked. "You may remember I never said I did not see."

"And have you seen as far as Russell Street?" she smiled.

I smiled too. "At present I am blind to that part of the town," I retorted; "but who knows? My sight may return. No, my pans and my pictures were let alone, except for an addition to the latter, but I have some mighty fine new furniture—and cushions—and a pair of coloured spar basins that I shall be pleased to show you when you do come."

"Gifts?" cried her Grace, "and from whom? His Majesty?"

"His Majesty, I think, hath forgotten I am there," I said amusedly. "Some day we shall meet—collide—in the corridor, and he will exclaim, 'Oddsfish, but it's the old Stuart pensioner! Will Chiffinch, what is she doing here? Where did you bestow her after all?' "

Frances went off into one of her enchanting ripples of mirth. "You think so? I'll prove you wrong. The King asked me only last night in the Queen's bedchamber whether you were settled in and if you had all you required, and Monmouth from the door of Her Majesty's ante-room cried out, before I could reply, that you were nearly established, and had everything but the curtains for your saloon. His Majesty smiled and said, 'Bless the boy, he is always seeing to the ladies' lodgings!—she shall have her curtains, though.' To which I replied, 'Oh, but Sire, I am to have the pleasure of looking after those; I am but now having a set of my ivory brocade lined and fringed with tawny silk made to fit.' "

I gave an exclamation of pretended annoyance and real gratitude. "My kindest benefactress, you have done too much for me. I will not take your curtains!"

"Then," retorted the Duchess, "you must put up with the King's. He had thoughts of sending a gentleman at once with that great bronze velvet cloak of his, saying the maids under your command would cut it up into capital hangings—'Being I'm tall, and it's wide!' he explained to me. 'But I would not for the world try to rival Richmond brocade. Nay, but Madame Stuart shall use it for a table-cover, or even a bedspread. Do you think that she would sleep less soundly covered with what has covered me?' The Queen laughed here. 'Why do you offer Mistress Stuart your cast-off clothing?' she said, and he shrugged his shoulders. 'It sounds amiss,' he cried; 'but what have I to give but cast-off goods?' Her Majesty looked once at him and was silent—why! we know what her Grace of Portsmouth gets out of——"

"Oh!" I said, a little impatiently, "can't you be forgetful, or ignorant, or blind too? What matters it to *us?*"

"Nay, but it matters to my mistress," said Frances Richmond, rapier-swift, and I replied, "I know it, forgive me; but 'The King can do no wrong.' "

"My dear soul," said my cousin, taking me by my arm and looking into my face with that quizzing smile of hers, "is that the line you mean to take? For you'll have to swear black is white if 'tis the case!"

"I'll swear nothing," I said stoutly. "See you, where should I be but for yours and His Majesty's kindness to me?"

"Do you also add: 'Frances Stuart can do no wrong'?" she asked, with the same smile.

"Certainly," I answered; "*can* you?"

"Without a shadow of doubt!" she laughed. "Ask the world."

"Never," I said, with emphasis; "never. I'll take the measure of the Stuarts with my own wand. 'Ask

the world.' Do you fancy I am going to form my estimate of you, and James, and the King, by what these others tell me—or would tell me if I asked them? (or tell me now, and I don't hear!)"

"That's loyalty," remarked the Duchess slowly. "I thought we'd forgotten all the old virtues. I do not think my cousin King Charles gets much of that service nowadays; it will be new to him."

Then it was my turn to laugh. "He'll never notice it," I said. "What service can I render him, what is my loyalty to him?"

"Ask me that," replied my friend, "a few years hence. Ask the young Duke then, ask the King, and see what reply you get."

"No"—I shook my head—"I won't ask them, I think."

Frances put an arm round my waist. "There'll be no need—they'll tell you! Now, which is it to be, Richmond rags or His Majesty's old clothes to cover your windows—or your bed? I will come to-morrow to see. And your new furniture, ah, yes! What hen-roost has that boy robbed for his—old—lady?" She spoke the words slowly, underlining them, and punctuating the remark with a little pressure at each pause.

"Oh, how horrible you are!" I cried. "Why should he rob one woman to give to another?"

"Ah, why?" said the Duchess of Richmond. "I cannot tell you that. But he does."

"I'll deny it," I exclaimed hotly. "You've known him for years, and I have not. Yet I'll deny it."

I deny it still. All the women in Monmouth's life occupied their separate niches. I do not think one was ever defrauded to enrich another; no, not even Anna his Duchess, for all she vowed it.

"Loyalty, loyalty," laughed Frances again. "But

how are you going to be loyal to all the Stuarts, my girl? When they take opposite sides, par exemple? How then?"

"I choose," I said. "I'll be loyal to you, and to the King's son, and the King—just you three."

"And supposing you find us all in opposition some day?" she asked.

"Why," I replied stoutly, "that will set me a hard task. I've been set hard tasks before, I can but try to overcome it, even if I do not succeed. Can *you* imagine yourself in opposition to the King?"

I must have been too deeply preoccupied with the thought of my own possible or probable difficulties, or I should never have put that question to Frances Stuart!

She took her arm from round my waist, made a quick turn, stood directly in front of me, burst into a ringing laugh, and clapped her hands. She opened her beautiful lips to speak, but I never let her.

"Stop," I said, more peremptorily than I had ever spoken to her before. "Stop. I am deaf, dumb, blind, forgetful, imbecile—just loyal, only that. And you have to be but one thing in addition to your unforgettable goodness to me, you must also be forgiving."

"Forgiving?" she smiled. "But you *are* imbecile, my dear. Forgive a Stuart? One is always doing that—always, always. If one does not——"

There was a silence in the room while the echoes of her voice died out. "Better kill him and have done with it," she said ("him," not "her"). "There's no other way."

How seldom was she serious!—and yet, on those

rare occasions, from what depths that seriousness came. I recollect the end of a conversation I had with her at the time when the Duchesse Mazarin came to Whitehall in 1675.

"She's as handsome as the devil!" Frances said to me. "I am not translating beauté du diable, no! If she had come over ten years ago, when——" She paused to catch my eye, and gave a little trill of mirth. "1665? H'm! she would have been plaguily in my way. Now I can admire her with a whole heart. People think I'm jealous! But my good soul, why? You know me and my position. I've had my day! I play at no rivalry with any one under the sun. In the old days, had Madame Venus herself entered the lists I would have been ready for her. I was beautiful. Tiens! why should I deny it, since I do not deny that it is over? Ah, as I have told you often, you never saw me before the smallpox. (Your loss!) This fine lady, she's older than I am—she's thirty or nearly, and for an Italian that's old—but she's far more lovely; and she looks younger than I do, though I do not think anybody who isn't a Stuart has good legs and feet," said Frances thoughtfully. "I believe Monmouth and I can play any one at that game, and, as a matter of fact, mine are better than his—a pity, since his are so much more seen!" I gave way to a gurgle of amusement. "And smallpox doth not affect that beauty. But legs don't help a woman much—unless her name is Arabella Churchill."

"Duchess," I said, trying not to smile, "you're becoming caustic of tongue. You remind me of her Grace of Monmouth."

"I?" cried Frances; "I remind you of Anna? Mercy! I must watch my words. (But thank you for telling me, all the same. As she hath the reputation for being a wit, I'll think over that later, and feel

happier.) Now this visitor, this sojourner among us? She amuses the Duchess of York—I'm glad she should. She won't amuse the Queen. Whom can we find to do that? Surely there is *some one?* I give it up, for I've tried myself!"

"She doth not want amusing," I replied, "but something quite different."

"In this life, my friend," said the Duchess, standing up before my mirror to rearrange her curls, "the people who want one thing only, come to grief. For either they don't get it, and then they go through life beggared, or they get it, and find, when they have it, that it's not worth having. I"—she waited to twist up a curl that had come unrolled—"I, for all they said and say of me, never wanted anything. I dare say I should have been a happier woman if I had; certainly I might have been an unhappier. But since I want for nothing, your Duchesse Mazarin can take nothing from me; and as for myself, I can praise her openly and truthfully—to your face, to hers! You shall hear me do it to-night. I will say to her, 'Madame, you know what it is to be perfectly beautiful, to have broken dozens of hearts, to have had lovers by the score in your train, to have married a duke, to have been sought in marriage by King Charles.' "

Her face suddenly changed and she turned abruptly on me.

"Why," she said, "why, Charlotte, that's my story as well as hers; that's my life. And I've done nothing with it—with my youth and my birth and my great beauty, all the love I've had offered me, I have done nothing at all."

I looked at her. "There's the Queen," I said, "the woman Charles married and did not love; there's you, whom he loved and did not marry; there's myself, whom he neither loved nor married. But

my life is at his commands. I sit here and await them."

"And if he forgets you and doth not send any?" asked my cousin curiously, pacing with restless steps up and down my room.

"Here I shall still sit," I replied.

"You're so sure of him as all that?" she asked, pausing and looking at me as if she did not quite understand.

"Quite sure," I said. "*There* I have the advantage! There's not a woman who believes in him —no, not the Duchess of Portsmouth, no, not Queen Catherine—only myself, and he knows it. So sometimes, Frances, you may think it over and understand why I'm at peace. Never a beauty, never a breaker of hearts, never a duke's wife, never loved—nor married —by the King."

"So having nothing, you have everything and are satisfied?" she asked slowly. "You're happy, you have what you want?"

I smiled. "Oh, no," I said. Frances Richmond gave a little comprehending nod. "But haven't you guessed that I have what was never given you? So you see me contentedly getting old and whole-heartedly admiring all you pretty ladies."

Frances turned from the mirror.

"I envy nobody," she said; "but if I did, I should be jealous of you."

I went up to her and laid a hand on her beautiful wrist.

"Never!" I said softly. "You do not want his friendship, his trust, his knowledge that you believe in him. 'Confess and be hanged!' "

She laughed outright. Then her fair face whitened.

"I want nothing," she said; "but have I anything? I have been offered so much; I have nothing at all; I have done nothing at all. That is my life."

She sat down on my couch and suddenly covered her face with her hands.

"'La belle Stuart!'" she said, "I shall go down to History as that—just that."

I looked at her and smiled serenely. "And I," I said, "shall not go down to History."

THE GENTLE ART OF MAKING ENEMIES

CHAPTER VIII

THE GENTLE ART OF MAKING ENEMIES

"Strange love they give you, love disloyal."—SWINBURNE.

"We, too, are friends to loyalty. We love
The King. . . .
And him we serve
Truly and with delight, who leaves us free.
We are
True to the death.
Mark now the difference, ye that boast your love
Of kings, between your loyalty and ours."

COWPER.

THE Duchess was true to her word, and the King ("whose word no man relied on!") to his—Her Grace and the great bronze cloak arrived at my door simultaneously, to the immense amusement of the lovely lady of the Bedchamber!

The gentleman who carried it happened to be none other than my Lord Arran; Charles, true Stuart, made anybody useful who came to hand, and the sight of his lordship as messenger, standing meekly outside my almost invisible little portal, was too much for the old Frances of the sixties, whose giggles had so irritated the Comte de Gramont. Arran, very splendid in dark green velvet with a crimson sash, bearing the cloak somewhat gingerly on his arm, the Duchess in a third mourning gown of grey taffeta sprigged with black and white, stood outside in mutual amusement when I myself raised my unobtrusive portcullis, I being decently if severely attired in a morning dress of this lavender woollen of the

cut of the grey lawn washed at Mrs. Gwyn's house in Windsor.

His lordship was, in the words of Pepys, "a very plain man," but a witty one, a great friend of Monmouth's though a decade his senior, the irresponsible nephew by marriage of the still more irresponsible Buckingham, a consolable widower who did not console himself by anything more serious than half a dozen love affairs at a time—a man whom I never really liked personally (though I did not think much as to whether I liked or disliked people; it was of little use!) and whom I thought an unworthy son of that fine old lord the Duke of Ormonde, and a still more unworthy brother of the beloved Lord Ossory.

"Enter!" I said gaily. "My dear Duchess, will you be the great Eliza, and shall my lord spread his cloak for you to tread on? Oh, 'tis His Majesty's? Thank you, sir, for bringing it, and we will not trample it underfoot yet. Come you within too. I want to show you what nest Mr. Chiffinch hath built for me. Is he not clever?"

"Chiffinch is no chaffinch," said Arran; "only a very nimble black spider. He spins parlours for fair ladies to walk into." I shook my head and began to make some allusion to my respectable years, but forbore suddenly (I think Frances noticed how suddenly!) remembering what a "friend" Arran was of Mrs. Crofts, born in 1637.

"Madame Stuart is becoming so discreet," she said. "She hath caught it already from the atmosphere of her new home. Only at Whitehall these few nights, and already she thinks of something to say—and doth not say it——!"

"And," I amended, "is consequently reduced to silence because she can think of nothing further to say in its place! Now, Frances, say what you will of my

plenishings so long as you admire whole-heartedly my tapestry couch and its pillows."

Arran put a critical glass to his eye. "Rat me, but I know that settee!" he said, and stopped.

"Now it's my lord who is approaching discretion!" I cried. "If we are every one so careful we shall be all reduced to silence, opening our mouths and shutting them again like the King's carps. Is it truly the method of the Court? I'm new; I must be informed. Lord Arran, is it the mode to recognise—a couch, shall we say, and then refuse it a salute? I'm sure it is an old friend of yours. You sat on it last somewhere in the Cockpit. 'Tis my young cousin Monmouth's."

I realised that the best thing, once for all, was to put forward our relationship and emphasise the difference in age between the Duke and me. I must stand on that footing, or life would not go forward on the lines I planned. Monmouth was, after all, too bad a boy to have running in and out of one's rooms unless he came definitely and publicly as my "young cousin." Arran's glass turned slowly upon me in the cold morning light. My hair was à la négligence under my muslin cap, my gown, as I have said, puritanically simple. I smiled!

Frances, a charming grey slenderness, sat herself down on the apricot cover among the tinted cushions. "One ivory," she commented, "then my brocade will strike no wrong note. These wide low windows, my dear!—why, you have a panorama of the river, and can watch and see who lands at the Privy Stairs!"

"Madame la Duchesse always wants to know too much," I explained to Arran. "Pray think of me, watching ever to see whose barge came by, what hooded or cloaked figure landed!"

"There goes one I can name, at least," said Arran. "That barge used to stop at the Stairs more frequently

in old days, udsbud! What does 'The Lady' here now?"

Frances Richmond raised herself, peeped out too, looked, and laughed aloud. "You forget her Grace of Cleveland hath a married daughter to settle also in Whitehall, in her mother's old rooms. That little baggage Anne Dacre, the chit! She comes to see to that, I'll warrant."

"Ah," said his lordship, dropping his glass with a chink on his gold buttons. "'Baggage' and 'chit'? dear Duchess, but how else? Think of her mother, and all her three fathers!" Country mouse, as I was, even I knew how Barbara's first child had been claimed by her husband, Lord Chesterfield, and the King. All the same. . . .

"*Think* of them," I said. "But, perhaps, since we are in Whitehall, we'll go on being wise, and not *speak* of them?" I had delivered my little thrust. These rooms of mine should be gossiped in—by those I chose to let gossip; no others. I had to decide, that was plain. Again Lord Arran saw the line I had chosen; he gave a very charming smile and bowed, taking the rebuke exactly as I wished. The Duchess, licensed libertine with her tongue, sat down again on the couch, leant back, and looked from one to the other. I held my ground, but I laughed, and so did he.

"Oh, Madame," he remarked. "I see you come to reform the Court."

"You may see that the Court does not come to undo me!" I said, and this time sharply enough. "Or, if you will, that while eating my master's bread and salt I do not play Sir John Coventry."

History does not condemn this worthy, who rose in the House of Commons to be witty at his Sovereign's expense, and had his nose slit for him, deservedly in my eyes, by Monmouth's men; but it cries out on Mon-

mouth, as I did not, and do not, as Arran his avowed friend would not.

"Come, sir," I added, "I seem to be preaching sermons in every sentence. Bands and gown would ill become me. I ask your forgiveness."

"It is my part to ask yours," he said generously. "We all want reminding of our duty now and then, Madame Stuart; tongues wag hereabouts, and I was a fool, I should have remembered your views."

The blood rose under the Duchess of Richmond's ceruse. "Arran," she said, though she laughed as she said it, "that is a hit at me. Anything may be said before the girl I was once, who shared Barbara Palmer's friendship and bed, eh, sir?—the woman who—— No matter. But it is not for you to throw stones at any one, my dear lord! And Madame Stuart shall pelt whom she pleases. Chiffinch has put her here? Aye, I know you, and the whole company of you! You've been whispering and chuckling and cocking an ear or an eyebrow over the newly installed lady, *just* in this place, *close* to the Royal apartments, and the maids' rooms, and those of Chiffinch himself, and what" —she leaned forward and looked fearlessly at him, speaking as if I did not exist—"and what do you all say?"

Arran's ugly face turned slightly ruddier in colour at this home-thrust; as for me, I was so much interested and amused that I did not care what happened. Of course the Duchess (as we both might have known) received the typical courtier's reply. "We say the sun has risen on us at last," he replied, with a bow to me.

I looked out of the window at the autumn sunshine inlaying with patines of gold the grey water, and I made a little curtsey in return. "My Indian summer, then, my lord. But you do not say that, you say nothing. You would never have noticed I was here

but for my kind kinsfolk," and I turned over the folds of the glorious bronze velvet as they lay across my desk.

At that moment a new voice broke in upon us. Barbara Cleveland's barge had indeed landed at the Privy Stairs, had indeed deposited her there, presumably (as had been suggested) on a visit to her newly married daughter. What took her Grace past my lodgings I do not know; I only know that she did come past, two or three gentlemen in attendance, Colonel Churchill among them, in all the splendour of his youthful good looks and fascination, and, the door of my ante-room being yet open, for the Duchess of Richmond's servants were at that moment bringing me the brocade curtains, she paused and looked straight in.

Whatever may be said against this lady, *I* have one word in her favour. Consistent she remained till the very end—beautiful, imperious, "the finest woman of her age," utterly lacking in virtue as in the virtues, so the Duchess of Cleveland lived and died, unrepentant, unchanged. That is set down by most writers as one of the worst traits in the character of one who from her earliest youth had no character; myself, I like her consistency, since I am not required to be her judge. She and Frances Richmond were on strange terms; her early jealousy of Frances (since the King without a shadow of doubt fell head over heels in love with *her* in her sixteenth or seventeenth year, and continued so, unavailingly, till she married the Duke of Richmond) being merely replaced by a distrust and a sensation of puzzled insecurity. Like me, her ladyship of Castlemaine never knew quite what to make of the relations between King Charles and his widowed cousin.

Charlotte Stuart.

"What's this?" was asked in her unmistakable voice, arrogant, impetuous, little careful as to what impression she created—to the end, as from the beginning, The Lady was she who must be obeyed. She had married her daugter at Hampton Court while we were at Windsor in August, His Majesty and the Duke of York going over for the day. I had not seen her before.

The servants, in some confusion, laid the parcels of silk in my entry and slipped away. Lord Arran was bowing his departure, Frances and I stood in the doorway of the saloon speeding him; outside, the brilliant group, in the centre of which was the Duchess of Cleveland, came to a standstill. Wrapped in a glorious cloak and hood of wine-red satin over a magnificently embroidered water-blue gown, her still splendidly handsome face heavily painted, huge pearls swinging at each toss of her imperial head, her fringed gloves struck smartly by one hand against the other, a high-heeled shoe tapping impatiently on the corridor floor—such was my first meeting with Grandison's daughter.

Frances Richmond looked up as I did, serenely, yet naughtily interested; she and I, modestly attired respectively in our lavender stuff and grey taffeta, seemed like Puritans compared with the gorgeousness outside my front door. Churchill was in full uniform, the other gentlemen were the young Earl of Sussex, her son-in-law, a gentleman of the Bedchamber to the King, and I think, Henry Savile, and perhaps Lord Suffolk. Behind all I saw the keen face of Mr. Chiffinch.

To that sort of inquiry made to the air, as it were, half a dozen answers rise unbidden to the lips, but I was learning the lesson I myself had set in joke not an hour before—that of silence. As she did not speak directly to me, as I had not been presented to her, I

was not called upon to do or say anything at all. I remained, neither advancing nor drawing back, just within the shadow of the entrance. The Duchess of Richmond, tall, infinitely graceful, debonaire, and entirely mistress of herself, leant against the frame of the door. Her gay eyes roved over the faces of the men accompanying the rival Duchess, all of whom bowed deeply to her, and Churchill, the impossible to embarrass, to me. Lord Sussex did already know me, but was in two minds; Lord Suffolk and I were not acquainted; Chiffinch I had met in the corridor that morning early.

Arran, with commendable promptitude and considerable ingenuity, disappeared from sight!

"What's 'this,' Your Grace?" said Frances, with that little backward toss of her head ("the reverse of a nod," I used to call it when the King used it), "why, that depends what 'this' may be. 'Tis"—she glanced into the room behind us, where the sun gleamed as if through stained glass by way of the cornelian bowl and the gold, orange, and rose of the cushions—" 'tis James's pretty things, or 'tis, again, Charles's roquelaure." She smiled faintly and thoughtfully at the heavy velvet draperies catching the light in turn.

Now had not the Duchess of Cleveland fallen somewhat from her high estate, an introduction of my rooms as being furnished by His Majesty and the young Duke would have wrecked me for ever, no matter how old I was—or looked! Typical Stuart in her recklessness, her love of mischief, her sense of humour, Frances yet had that extraordinary aloofness of bearing (a lonely Duchess as Charles was "a solitary Sovereign") and capacity for handling any scene whatsoever; also she always gave me the idea of being a looker-on, just as he did, no matter how active a part either was taking. This was another

Stuart quality, but one which neither Monmouth nor the Duke of York possessed.

Barbara Cleveland stared straight into the room past Frances and me, at the familiar velvet cloak, and laughed, just a little. "So," she said, "further apartments for Royal use?"

Again I remained silent, again Frances picked up the glove. "For this lady," she said, quite simply, almost carelessly, indicating me with the merest gesture. This was, if unceremonious, at any rate some kind of presentation. I took it in the light manner in which it was executed—I gave a perfunctory smile and curtsied slightly. The Duchess of Cleveland turned and faced me direct ("*What* a beautiful woman you still are!" I said to myself), while the men behind her moved a little uneasily, and Churchill bowed again.

"This lady?"

"My kinswoman, and a kinswoman of the King."

If Frances Richmond had been a modern man, her answer would have been given while selecting and lighting a cigarette—such a description explains the tone of voice in which she spoke.

"An ennobled pensioner, then?" This was the first direct piece of insolence; the glove was not tossed lightly on the floor, it was flicked across my face. I was quite ready, however. I smiled as charmingly as I knew how. The Test Act had removed Barbara from Queen Catherine's service, she had been created Duchess of Cleveland only after Mrs. Gwyn had borne the King a son, and his fancy had been caught by Mademoiselle de Querouaille; the treaty which Charles drew up only admitted her to the ranks of the duchesses upon her promising to give up Henry Jermyn and to "rail no more upon Mdlle. Wells and Mdlle. Stewart."

As I say, I smiled, and said, in much the same easy

tones as the Duchess of Richmond had used, "Why, no, Your Grace. I come to Court for the first time—I do not go. I have no title given me; in sooth, I think my own name will serve." I saw the ready fury blaze up in the Duchess's face—in myself the Stuart temper had leapt, burning cold as doth a spray of ether, but I knew perfectly well that to lose my self-control would be an absolutely fatal move; such wit as I possessed must be my only weapon, and I must keep my head at all costs.

"And this wonderful name?" she asked contemptuously, though it was plain one shaft had gone home.

"Stuart," lazily remarked Frances, Stuart-born herself, and Stuart-married.

There was no one present who dared scoff at *that* name, at all events! I had had a second shaft fleshed for me, now I could afford to take a different initiative. "My cousin the Duchess of Richmond's influence hath procured me the post of mistress of Her Majesty's sewing-maids, hence Mr. Chiffinch hath set apart for me this corner of their quarters," I volunteered, conversationally. "Will you not enter, Madame? My lodging is but just ready for company, indeed, hardly fit yet, but——" I gave a little movement, half an indication to the group that I bade them be welcome, half a shrug of apology for shortcomings. Barbara Cleveland measured me from top to toe.

Was I "worth while," or was I not? In the sporting parlance of to-day, I was a dark horse; I was obviously no new mistress, I was a recognised relation. If I were entirely new to polite society, it did not follow that my appearance at Whitehall under the wing of a lady of the Bedchamber, encouraged by the King, arranged for by Chiffinch, counted for nothing. Was I going to be dangerous; should I carry any

weight? I could see her wondering, and the men behind her wondering, soaked as they were in Court etiquette, masked as they all could be at will, and I confess I never felt nearer bursting into laughter in anybody's face than I did at that moment. I dared not catch Frances's eye!—I knew if I did we should both break down, and then it would be declared war between us and the Duchess of Cleveland, and, in *our* turn, could we afford that? And after all, was it, not "worth while," but "worth it"?

"I am pressed for time to-day," said Her Grace, with a certain change of tone. "I am on my way to my daughter's apartments. When Mrs. Stuart"—she looked pointedly at my left hand for a wedding-ring—"is fairly established, I will wait on her duly."

"Madame Stuart, at your service," I interpolated.

"Ah, your husband is abroad?"—a nonchalant query flung over a shoulder.

"Nay," I replied, "my husband is dead these many months; he is not travelling."

It would have been wiser, perhaps, to have omitted the end of that sentence; the unfortunate Roger Palmer, Earl of Castlemaine, was running about Europe then, and did so from his final separation from his wife in 1666 until 1677, but the temptation was too great to resist. Frances, still leaning against the doorway, put a crown upon the indiscretion.

"Husbands are best away," she said, not as cleverly as she might have done.

The late Lady Castlemaine wheeled upon her in an instant. "Sure, *you* find it so, Duchess!" she said, and laughed outright.

At this juncture I frankly admit my acquaintance with The Lady of Clarendon's Memoirs was like to have begun and ended in a single day, but a door farther along the corridor opened, and there came towards us His Grace the Duke of York, with only

a page in attendance. Churchill (in his service) still patiently immovable in waiting on Lady Castlemaine's humour, broke the spell, and moved forward to meet his master.

Of the same height as Monmouth, say, an inch or so less than the King's, his light brown[1] peruke curling over a handsome suit of deep sea-blue cloth with a gold-worked sword-belt, James of York made an imposing figure in spite of his lack of Stuart grace and fascination, despite the waning of his great early promise of handsomeness. I have never seen more beautiful teeth than his—it was a sad pity he smiled so seldom and therefore rarely showed them! He had the typical Stuart feet and hands, his bones were on a smaller scale than his brother's. Charles was deliberately ugly, but no one who looked at both for the first time ever wanted to look at James again. One was the King, and would have looked the King while clad in rags, making no demands upon his subjects' recognition or the Court etiquette; the other, dignified in his way, was yet lacking in that quality of drawing the eye possessed by his elder brother, and notably by Monmouth, who was not dignified at all!

Fate forced me into a position at the Restoration Court, in which, as I have said, intimacy and friendship with the Duke of York were impossible, even had I been of the type of woman he liked; the little part I had to play put me outside all possible sympathy with or from him; that I see now more plainly than I saw it then, and I regret it to-day far more deeply than I did in the past. Charles and Monmouth filled my world. They fill it still, but there is room for the misunderstood brother and uncle

[1] One cannot help remarking that his perukes varied in colour, according to his portraits, nearly as often as did the wigs of his great-grandmother, Mary Queen of Scots.

whose very atmosphere was that of unpopularity, whose temperament did not in the least fit in with these gay days, whose children and whose mistresses (except Mrs. Sedley) turned against him, whose advances were impertinently flouted, not politely resisted, by chits of maids-of-honour. The world went uphill with James of York—I might have understood him better, I wish I had. He never tried to understand me, but why should he have done so? There was I, tool (presumably) of his brother and his secretly loathed nephew, between whom and himself the breaking-point was soon after reached in the sordid rivalry over worthless Mrs. Kirke, that girl with her nun's face and her utterly evil life. Women —women—women! The vicious were under my feet wherever I turned, wearying me past bearing, and indeed, for all the glamour cast over them by modern writers, offering no inducements to me to follow in their footsteps.

Already Court difficulties—James suffered from them too!—pressed upon me; as for the Duchess of Cleveland, bad temper had carried her on its crest too long to be abandoned.

Frances Richmond still leant against the doorway and went on laughing!

The men stood aside—the Duke looked at us two, we curtsied, Lady Castlemaine held out a careless hand for him to kiss as though she were a queen herself, her great pearls swaying in her ears.

James saluted the extended hand, I was interested to see, as carelessly as it was proffered, the lady began to speak and checked herself, seeing him turn to Frances and me without a word to her, good friends outwardly as they still remained. Not for the first time did I wish that Chiffinch had managed to find me a nook or corner not quite so near his Highness's part of the palace!

"Ah, sir," said Frances lightly, "you behold us settling—or unsettling?—Madame Stuart in her place. I trust she is a quiet and peaceful neighbour?" Frances's championship was not always conducted on the smoothest lines for the championed, as I was learning. I caught Churchill's amused eye over the Duke's shoulder.

"I have heard nothing of Madame Stuart since she occupied these rooms," said the Duke, heavily and literally. I curtsied again.

"I trust, Highness, that I am neither audible nor warlike," I said, feeling as I did so that I had become infected with some of his dullness of expression.

"I advise peace," he said looking at me coldly. "You will find that line the best to take. Rebellion hurts most those that rebel."

Now why in the name of all we believed in did he say that to me? I felt my eyes opening wider and wider.

"Rebellion, sir?" I asked. "But I am His Majesty's most obedient slave."

The Duchess of Cleveland laughed shortly. "You see Mrs.—Madame Stuart's rôle?" she cried. "*Now* we understand. Charles's bondswoman!"

I doubt if I ever felt more angry, yet at the same time through my icy wrath ran a streak of warm enthusiasm and satisfaction. Before several witnesses, all unintentionally, this woman who never knew what loyalty meant, stamped me as loyal.

"Aye, sir," I went on, addressing myself to the Duke as if he had spoken. "Bound by gratitude, service, and devotion, entirely, now and always at the King's orders. Loyalists don't expect freedom."

Just for once James of York's sombre gaze answered mine with sympathy. "Those who serve His Majesty are not free," he remarked ruminatively,

the light dying out as he thought (I could guess) of his own position. The Duchess of Cleveland laughed once more.

"Slave to the King!" she cried; "never your own again; you cannot even call your *soul* your own!"

"Your Grace's pardon," I answered; "*can I not?*"

. . . . .

I seem always careful to represent myself in these memoirs as having the last word. Indubitably I had it on many occasions; I am also convinced that I was a fool to win such engagements. "Another such victory and I am undone"—yes, Barbara had far too much power still with Charles for me not to risk everything in coming into conflict with her. Once more alone I sat by my window, white-faced, wondering if I had not ruined myself at the outset by my sharp tongue. But—and there again I wish to drive home my point—I had not done so, for His Majesty, if ever he knew of the affair, cared nothing. Barbara quarrelled with everybody, every day, himself included!—and besides, forgot my existence half an hour later. I did myself more harm with the Duke of York than any one, perhaps, though he outwardly agreed with me, since I showed him I was afraid of nobody, and could dare the King's still powerful favourite. A meek nonentity, I had been pardoned, overlooked, taken into favour at St. James's when remembered! I was never denied there, and, as I will relate, went at times to wait on Mary of Modena, and would certainly have seen far more of her and the Ladies Mary and Anne had it not been for his Highness. Even if Monmouth came and went as he pleased, in spite of the Needham scandal, until the definite break in the relations between his uncle and himself over Moll Kirke, which ensued during

the next year, it did not follow that a female partisan of Monmouth was welcome.

But though the Duchess of Monmouth might dismiss me as harmless, and the Duchess of Cleveland be unaware of my existence the next time we met, James of York never forgot. It took me over ten years to realise that he had summed up my weight, worth, and *danger to himself*—labelled me, put me away in his unwritten list of enemies; that to the morning of which I have now spoken I owe the fact that, more than a decade later, a guard was set at my threshold and I found myself a prisoner.

THE KING'S BONDSWOMAN

CHAPTER IX

THE KING'S BONDSWOMAN

"Love is service—service and giving."
MAURICE HEWLETT.

THUS my establishment at Whitehall was accomplished, and for a couple of days after the encounter with the Duchess of Cleveland nothing of note occurred. On the morning of the third day, all my affairs being in order as far as I could arrange them, I sat at my desk considering my position. Chiffinch had kept the greatest surprise of all from me. I had imagined that lodgings and most of my diet (and my maid's), sent from the Royal kitchens, would be the extent of the King's kindness; I had been taken to see the apartments of the sempstresses, and had been told exactly what I was to overlook, and to be responsible for[1]—in short, my small duties were explained to me, and I had immediately made friends with the women, who in their turn I found equally anxious to please me, and at once desirous of being taught my lace-making, while in exchange they offered to do any sewing I might require. I thanked them; I had my personal woman, and she having but little else to do beyond keeping my abode in order (with that I said at once I would trouble none of the Royal servants!), was quite capable of looking after my modest wardrobe. The £300[2] for the

1 When the Queen stayed at Somerset House I did not accompany her; Mrs. Elizabeth Elliott was her head sempstress there.
2 I repaid Frances this loan out of my savings before long.

pearls was no more than half spent, meantime I was well set up in clothes and did not intend to launch out any further till I saw what was expected of me at Whitehall. Had I, for example, been required to be constantly with the Queen, or sent for often to St. James's by the Duchess of York, was I needed nightly for dancing, music, or cards, my wardrobe must be enlarged. As a matter of fact, as I afterwards discovered, the King had his own ideas about me from the beginning, he never meant me to become a well-known figure at Court; I was to remain close at hand, more or less unnoticed, in case he needed me. For the rest, there was I, there was my comfortable little withdrawing-room, and till I was set any task for which he might consider me fitted, I and my lodgings played the part of a good listener and a convenient refuge, and, as a matter of fact, I was really in his service, and not Queen Catherine's. All this revealed itself slowly.

But that morning Chiffinch had called early, and I had received him in my undress, a simple loose "night gown" of purple lutestring bordered with fur—the autumn winds blew shrewdly off the river already.

I can honestly say I do not know who was the most surprised, myself, or Chiffinch because I was surprised! He informed me in a perfectly matter-of-fact manner, that I was to be allowed £200 a year in addition to my lodging and food. My exclamation at this brought a fleeting smile to the stern, dark face.

"My good man!" I cried, lifting and dropping my hands; "but this is too much! And for what doth His Majesty pay me? Let us be plain; I shall be able to see my way—and his—better."

Chiffinch moved a little in his seat and turned over the sheaf of papers in his hand. "Madame," he said,

"these are the King's instructions. 'Prepare a lodging for Madame Stuart my kinswoman, make arrangements for her supervision of the Queen's sempstresses, pay her until further notice according to our Royal will, the sum of £200 per annum in quarterly instalments.' His Majesty added, when he gave me my instructions, 'You know the lady—good. You understand she must be lodged as befits a gentlewoman, but she is not of extravagant tastes, and I wish her to be conveniently lodged'—the King dismissed, at this point, one or two other sets of rooms possible to be allotted to you," added the Keeper of the King's Closet, "they were farther afield, though more commodious."

"But," I said, "these are amply large, most comfortable; you, Mr. Chiffinch, have fitted them up for me in a delightful manner" (he bowed in silence). "My duties seem but nominal, and I really fail to see how I can earn one tithe of such a salary!"

"Consider it a pension, then. And no life, however quietly lived, in this place, can be anything but fairly costly," answered Chiffinch in a business-like tone. "You may suddenly find expenses cropping up which you do not at present foresee. Pardon me, Madame, but you are new to Whitehall?"

I laughed, and he smiled slightly again. "As new as could be!" I said. "I had never attended their Majesties' Court before this last summer—think of it! I am a countrywoman, or have been. But I am learning the ways of the town, I trust, yet I still wonder at the King's kindness to me."

Chiffinch rose. "I have served His Majesty long," he said, "and I hope to serve him longer"—here his face grew grave, we all knew that a year or so before Charles's health had given cause for deep anxiety—"yet not even I, who am supposed to wonder at

nothing, have ceased to wonder at my master's kindness."

"Mr. Chiffinch," I replied, my voice dropping ever so little, "if you still wonder, who know him so well, I am content to go on wondering. But I must thank him, and that is not easily done, as I have already found out."

"Do not use words, Madame," he replied, taking my hand and bending over it in farewell.

"Why, what then?" I asked him.

"Deeds," said William Chiffinch, and went out.

"All very well," I remarked to myself, returning to my chamber to have my hair dressed and my lavender gown laced, "All very well; but what deeds? I suppose Time — or the King — will show!"

Hardly was I fully equipped than one came again to my outer door, a Royal page. "Would Madame Stuart receive His Majesty in ten minutes?"

So Charles came for the first time to the apartments he had given his pensioner.

He was quite unattended, save for the handsome tall boy who had brought the message, and who, at a word from him, left the ante-room, closing the outer door softly behind him; and Charles, with his lithe, swift, yet unhurried stride crossed the room to the fireplace, where burned a small cheerful blaze, and leant an elbow above it. He was carelessly, almost shabbily attired in a very dark maroon suit lined and faced with black (he was no dandy), and as I looked at him I thought how extraordinarily plain a man he was, yet how attractive in a sort of whimsical un-selfconsciousness, how little he laboured the

point of being a king, yet how unmistakably he was one, how his heavy features, swarthy skin, large bones, and bad dressing ought to have militated against any pleasure his appearance gave the onlooker. And yet that tall figure, with the loose-limbed easy bearing, the perfect feet and hands, the bright all-seeing eyes, the fine teeth—above everything, the quite indescribable Stuart quality of personality—made the men who usually surrounded him look like vulgar garish puppets, and this very uncomeliness seem a beauty in itself. At his Court we worshipped beauty with true pagan fervour; the ill-looking were criticised as soundly as the ill-doing, the writers of the day fell into ludicrous despair over their hideous king, the portrait painters caricatured him, laboured over his "rule-defying profile," and forgot to show the wit and sense of humour behind the deep-set eyes, the brain behind the unlovely forehead, the charm of the smile that transformed the cynical lips.

Charles's appearance has been distorted on canvas as much as his character on paper. Another deceptive type of writing has made him out the irresistible seducer, the ugly man whose very ugliness has a wicked attraction. This I can understand, but it was never that which struck me most. And perhaps, because of it, my affection for and appreciation of him was a clearer-sighted, simpler emotion than that of most people.

I loved him because I liked him!

I made neither god nor devil of Charles II; to me he was a man and a King of many faults, and some complexity not only of character and action but of looks! but always, from the first, the man worthy of love, the King worthy of service. I wonder what I should have done if he had set me a task which entailed the sacrifice of all I held to be right and

honourable? That is the hardest of all hard questions for a Royalist.

I moved forward one of Monmouth's chairs, with the King's own cypher and crown on the back. He glanced at it and laughed.

"Yes, Sire," I said, "I offer you your own chair, in your own room, under your own roof!"

"Why, as to that," he replied, as he took it, "the roof is mine, but the room is yours, cousin, and so is the chair—perhaps I must continue the owner of these"—he touched the carved and gilded emblems of his kingship. He leaned an elbow on the arm, propped his left chin in one palm, and looked up at me under his bushy brows, I standing where he had stood before, a foot on the hearth-stone, three fingers on the high mantelshelf. We smiled at each other.

The dress of that day was, I always maintain, a more becoming one for men than for women.[1] Yet if one had a passable figure and enough hair, the massed curls at each side of the head and the longer ones pendent on the shoulder, the straight lines of the corsage with the pretty fussiness of the turned-back sleeves revealing lace and lawn, the full skirts caught up at each side pannier-wise—short in those days, a fashion set by the Queen to exhibit a tiny foot—were capable of sufficiently charming interpretation. I was never at my best in severest attire, full dress meant for me the fullness of such beauty as I had; but I recollect that lavender stuff gown as an attractive one, and I wore that day, I remember, as did the good housewifely dames in private, a lawn and lace apron, and, over my curls, a little cap to

[1] Of course most people are aware that the loose flowing draperies seen in nearly all the female portraits of the time formed a kind of uniform imposed upon ladies by custom, and were unlike what was really worn, especially during the daytime.

match. My discreet rôle should be emphasised; such was my intention.

He looked me up and down as closely as my Lady Castlemaine had done, but in a very different manner.

"Already at your duties?" he questioned. "How unlike our family!"

"Already at my play," I retorted, "how can you call mine duties? I go and see those good souls, and I admire their work, and I suggest this and am taught that—oh, they are teaching me my trade, I warrant you!—and we part excellent friends, all of us wondering of what use I am." And I smiled again in the meditative way I had caught from Charles and Frances.

"Well, well, 'tis for me to decide," remarked my Sovereign.

"Indeed you have decided, Your Majesty," I said earnestly. "Decided to make a place for me to fill, and to pay me a heavy salary for it—yes, let me speak." I sat down on the low stool that matched the couch and held out both my hands towards him. "Sire, you may command me anything, but you shall not forbid me to render you decent thanks! Yourself, the Duchess of Richmond, the Duke of Monmouth"—I looked round the room as I spoke—"kind—kind—kind—all of you, and for nothing."

"Mistress Stuart," said the King, leaning forward in the high-backed chair, "let me ask you this: 'Why not?' Wait a little before you thank us, before you say we are kind. We have taken charge of you—I do not think we ever thought of asking your permission!—we have engaged your present and future, and we see you have a couple of rooms, a gown or two to your back, and we give you our Royal word that you shall have an adequate recompense for your services!" Up went the witty eyebrows. "Now, ask my courtiers and my servants, and—and others, if

they can ever be sure of getting their money regularly? They'll tell you they can't be sure of getting it irregularly. They'll shrug, and add, 'You know Charles—his way? He pays, sometimes, when he can, and sometimes when he can he does not, he pays somebody else!' I gave you no rooms, my trusty Will cut you up a corridor and—yes, he's cut it up well. Will should have been a carpenter. Instead, he deals with the wooden heads of my courtiers for me. That boy of mine gave you some furniture he didn't want; I am sure he told you so! Frances looked you out some ancient curtains—aye, very pretty; all Frances's household gear is pretty—and none too new. I, too late in the day, bade Arran bring you some of my old clothes! By the way, what have you done with that cloak?"

"Sire," I answered, "my woman is removing (very carefully) the collar, and that will be kept safely; the rest makes something of a square and will be thrown over yonder table at times, but I do not wish to employ it often."

"Why not?" queried Charles.

"Sire," I said again, and very seriously, "forgive me, but your cloak must remain a cloak. When I die I am going to be buried in it; that is, if Your Majesty does not mind?"

Charles leant back and burst out laughing. "My Majesty minds very much!" he said. "Oh, not about the cloak but your dying. I hope you will live to wear out a dozen such first!" I smiled and shook my head.

" 'Tis only a foolish notion," I answered, "but if you forgive me, no one has any right to forbid it."

Nor had they.

If there comes a time when the half-ruinous Abbey

Church of St. Alban is restored and the pavement taken up, they may find beneath a plain slab a small figure, wrapped in a man's crumbling bronze velvet roquelaure; upon the breast will lie a packet with two curls of hair, one silky dark brown, the other dense black streaked with white, and in one of the skeleton hands will be clasped a little gold and diamond seal with a cairngorm stone. So, if I rise at the End of All in my body, I shall rise clad in his cloak, with his hair and his son's hair on my heart, and in my fingers the little seal that closed his last letter to me, the letter I never had, and the last he wrote on earth.

And if I rise not thus, why, what matters it? If I do not meet King Charles in the next world, then all my life with him goes for nothing at all—my devotion, my gratitude, my humble affection, my broken heart, my unbroken loyalty. I talk much of what I gave him; but do I fail to talk of what he gave me? Yet I do not concern myself much with these useless questions, and I shall lie quite quietly under his brown velvet, holding his brown seal, while England goes on with her different kings and her differing creeds, and await my orders. If service it still be, may it be service under a King of England, somewhere, somehow!

"My friend, before we bury you, we want you to do a little living for us first."

The firelight struck upward under the thick lashes, the black eyes that were only brown when the light shone through them regarded me with that lazy yet concentrated gaze of which his courtiers noted the laziness and mine saw the concentration. "'Never look back on the past' is one of my mottoes. 'Never look forward to the future' is what I say in public.

Let us eat and drink for to-morrow we are—buried in my cloak! There we are back again at your funeral, fair lady! But, without jesting, it seems to me that there is owing to you some—h'm—happiness (shall I say pleasure?) in life. We might manage that for you. You want a holiday, eh? I do not express surprise at these grey locks; could you see your beautiful monarch without his peruke you would find him a grizzly old gentleman, I can tell you! Oddsfish, I'd frighten you soundly without all this," he pulled at the shining black curls that hung over his shoulders. ("Oh, Sire!" I interpolated suddenly and enthusiastically, "how mighty fine you'd appear in a white one!") "But you're young yet." I shook my head. "Well, then, you're old! but you have not found much gaiety in life. I ask no questions, I merely state the facts. I have not been told them; I know them."

The firelight's reflection was suddenly eclipsed, and shone out again. "Now I want my people to be happy. They never are, because they do not know how to be. Not one in a million knows how, and that man, or that woman, is held back from happiness by something else. *I* know how."

He looked from me into the fire and was silent; I dared say nothing. I shaded the light from my face with one hand and watched him. One could never take one's eyes from King Charles, nor from his son Monmouth. They both possessed that magnetism. The one was constantly watched by those who seldom understood what they saw; the other was stared at, frankly, openly, almost bewilderedly, by those who were literally dazzled by his good looks, and blinded thereby to what was behind them. There was not so very much, but there was a good deal!—more than the world thought.

"Now"—I gave a little start, the pause had been

long!—"I want you to find my house a pleasant place. What are you for, Madame? Dancing, music, cards? You shall have them all."

"Dancing, Your Majesty," I said boldly, "as often as you bid me—the oftener the better, I vow to you! That will include music; cards, if I am needed, but I am the poorest player, and a terrible gamester to boot. Excuse me if you will!" We both smiled, and he shifted his position a little.

"Men?" he said. "Now there are plenty of men! No lady ever complains of the lack of 'em here. You've led an austere life and found it dull. Gallantry might occupy you." He considered me with his tolerant understanding expression of countenance. "'Honest gallantry'—you take all, and give nothing; that's why it's called honest, they inform me. Study men, make friends of them, make them talk—you listen—they tell you everything, and you tell them nothing in return!"

I dropped my hand and let the fire shine as it would on my face. "Now, Sire, do you think that would amuse me?"

"Vastly," said Charles in his dry way. "It amuses me, at all events, and I am a man myself, and ugly and old! You do not think it would divert you?"

"Beyond measure!" I said; "but, forgive me, I want more than diversion. I—want—work," I said this deliberately. The King again threw himself back in his chair and his white teeth flashed at me in a hearty laugh.

"And what did you say your name was?" he inquired politely as soon as he could speak; at that we laughed together.

"Nay, but I mean it," I persisted. "Let us be frank, Sire; I'm too old and yet too young. I'm not plain enough, and assuredly I'm not pretty enough!

As for women, they like me or loathe me; generally they loathe me. Let me note how I proceed. I think I had better lead a private life. It seems to me that my public appearances generally end in my making enemies! and that is purely clumsy."

His Majesty seemed amused at my frankness. "Why, you've had no luck with my brother James," he commented, and I sighed—so *that* fact had made itself evident already?—a pity. "But with that senseless son of mine—oh, I doubt not but that you owe some of your 'enemies' to him! He sings your praises till I bid him begone. James my brother and James my son never can let well alone, and so some day"—he shook himself—"I'm at the shroud business afresh?" he suggested, and glanced slyly at me.

"Ah," I said bending forward from my seat and kissing the long brown fingers that hung over the arm of the chair; "ah, no! *I* have it; Your Majesty has left yourself none; you have condemned yourself to immortality, you see. But we are doing our best to talk of life, though we succeed but ill. After all, 'tis only my most insignificant life. If you will but befriend me, you and your son, I shall get all the happiness I can promise myself or expect out of existence."

Charles regarded me intently. "You want us *for friends?*" he said slowly. "Now I never met a woman who did that before! But if you can be a friend, a real friend, to James, you'll serve him better than you guess, and me better than—well, than I anticipate. Oh, I see you want to protest. I'll tell you no woman has been his friend. They all fall in love with him; they do it every day. You will find some morning (or some night!) that James has carried you off your feet and you either adore him, or hate him.

There are women at Court who hate him worse than they hate——" he looked at me and added "you!" which was not in the least what he meant to say, as he and I were perfectly well aware. My mind flew to the magnificent Duchess of Cleveland, my junior by a year, perhaps less, so soundly detested, especially now that she was on the downgrade; to the gorgeous Duke of Buckingham, now falling from his high place; to other courtiers and courtesans, good and bad, men and women, who had risen, and, by their own folly, sunk once more, in the fourteen and a half years that had elapsed since the King came into his own again. I thought of those now rising—the Duchess of Portsmouth, and her French influence; Monmouth himself, who was climbing fast and far; this statesman and that—and the silence endured till Charles patted my shoulder.

"We shall see," he said a trifle sardonically. "You virtuous women, you think yourselves so sure, you ladies in the thirties, you are so positive your life is over. Wait till you are tried! Tell me, do you know what temptation means?"

"Oh," I said very quietly, "you think Whitehall will turn my head? You think the Duke will become my lover if ever he fancies it worth while? You think, Sire, that I am good because I have never been asked to be bad—how do you know I have never been asked? And how do you know I am good, to begin with?"

My shoulder was patted again, very kindly. "Bless the child," remarked Charles (as if he had been Frances!) "what does she take me for? A good man, that does not know a bad woman when he sees one? or a bad man—as I am—who knows a good woman by sight as soon as ever he looks at her? There's much you can teach me, my dear, but I've learnt something about your sex already. (So has

James, but he wants a few more lessons.) My cousin, I am a king. Well, need I explain to you what that means to a certain class, a very large class, of women? I don't blame them; but neither should you blame me."

I was on my feet, a sudden gust of anger for him, not against him, shaking me like the autumn winds outside my river windows. "May I be judged, Sire!" I cried with flaming cheeks, "if ever I judge you! Blame you? Do what you will—with others—against me. I'll take all as you choose. I'll accept your decisions on everything. You are my master."

He rose to his feet too and stood towering above me. "Ah," he said with a note in his voice few people ever heard, "so that is it? The Cavalier spirit, the way those who followed my father served him. He forgot his friends—they tell me I forget mine. He lost his cause, his throne, his life, Charlotte Stuart, and the Cavaliers went into exile, disgrace, and poverty with his son."

"Why," said I, "if that be my fate and my duty, I shall not complain. What you will, Sire, what you will!" and I drew myself up, little woman as I was, till I was of quite imposing stature on my high French heels.

The King smiled down at me. "I shall hold you to your word," he said, "though your name is Stuart! You are bound hand and foot in my service by your own wish? Wilful woman. I offer you the utmost gaieties of my consumedly dull Court—Lord! it wearies me to death at times, my people are such fools. I offer you lovers, and you get behind your armour of habitual virtue and assumed old age, and are most pointedly lenient with such an outrageous proposal!" Again the firelight glittered in the deep-set eyes. "I warn you, like a wise and careful

parent, against my dangerous son. You bristle all over in a way that suggests you already have doubts as to your ability to resist him." My lips parted here in unrestrained merriment! "Then I threaten you with the fate of my father's friends—or rather, I think, you threaten me! Your own son is in my service abroad? Good. Hath he a pair of colours? No? He shall have them. I'll see the despatch goes. I'm dealing (for once) with my army's affairs to-morrow. Nay, I'll have no more thanks; for mercy's sake do not you begin to weary me too. So far I have found you a change from other women, they don't trouble me with thanks much; you are something different, after all. And now, my cousin, I must go—to my work or to my play, you say it matters not to you? No, no more it does, truly! But we understand each other, I think, and that's something."

"That is everything, Sire," I said fervently, yet smiling so that he should not think me too serious. "But, Your Majesty, this one thing. I pray you do not set me on too high a pedestal. I have known temptation, I am no saint."

"Yes," and the kind hand took mine—I did not kiss his, mine was kissed by him—"I know all about you, as I told you before. I know exactly the sort of woman you are. I've made suggestions to you to-day to hear you receive them precisely as I knew you would. I've warned you against that rapscallion of mine to see you protest that you have your head and your heart under proper control. In one thing only have I been surprised—aye, we are frank, and will remain frank to the end of this interview—I did not think you were prepared to be so"—he paused and gave his chin a little tilt sideways—"so *obedient* to me!"

Here I risked a good deal, incurable gambler as I

was, and am. "'The King's slave,'" I said; "'the King's bondswoman. Loyalists don't expect freedom.'"

This was directly quoted from my encounter with the Duchess of Cleveland and the Duke of York of three days previously. I took it for granted (an excellent method in which I persevered) that Charles knew everything. I might anger him, as I had obviously angered his brother, and I was having, as I knew perfectly well, just one little trial of my strength as opposed to both of theirs. Their master and mine looked down into my half-defiant, half-frightened face with a perfectly enigmatical expression. He may have known—or not have known, not knowing, he may have guessed—whatever he did, he certainly understood.

"You're a brave woman!" he remarked, making, I thought, the first mistake during our conversation.

"Never believe a Stuart can be a coward," I replied, more for the sake of replying than anything else.

He shook his head. "You don't know us yet," he concluded, and turned to the door.

I was to come to know them better, certainly, this Royal branch of the family of which I was born and into which I had wedded. I saw cowardice come to them, and bravery come again, and I myself have only been upheld by my name from poltroonery under a severe trial. But whatever I saw of King Charles I never saw in him the slightest shadow of fear. They say he was afraid of his women and would do anything for peace's sake; they say he dreaded France and so took Louis's pay; they say he feared death and the Judgment at the end, and so died in the faith

he had not the courage to profess openly; all this they said, and say still.

And I say my little say, I add my testimony to the rest. *Charles never was afraid.* Neither of man nor woman, of enemy or friend, of the life here or the life to come. That is my belief; so you have it for what it is worth.

THE CHASTE NYMPH

CHAPTER X

THE CHASTE NYMPH

"Runs the blood of the old world slow?
Where are they now who reigned of yore?
Plaster casts in a dusty row,
(Heathen Mythology's such a bore!)
Thus you smile at my classic lore,
'Finishing touches I love to show,
Ah, you forget that I lived before
With these gods I pretend to know!"

M. N.

The winter of 1674 was upon London.

Rehearsals of *The Masque of Calisto, the Chaste Nymph*, were in full swing; the Duke of Monmouth had restored himself to favour at St. James's by the simple process of behaving as if he had never been out of it! It was perfectly obvious that no one could lead the ballet but he, and as the Duchess of York was absolutely determined that the play should be a success, Mrs. Needham was conveniently forgotten for the time. As the Principal Shepherd, wearing his own short hair (in which his father thought he looked "better far!") and picturesque ragged leather jerkin and breeches, armed with a flower-wreathed crook and with a stage lamb tucked under his arm, Monmouth was ready once more to turn all heads not yet turned, and to my prejudiced eyes looked even more fascinating than in his usual Court splendour.

The sewing maids' apartments hummed; it was strange how many little stray tasks Her Majesty's sempstresses were called upon to perform, though the

actual fancy dresses were fashioned by the Court tailors and mantua-makers, Master John Allan, for example, producing mighty fine semi-classical suits for the young maids-of-honour who were cast for male parts, tall Herietta Wentworth as Jupiter and precocious Sarah Jennings as Mercury looking especially well. The two young princesses, well-grown girls in spite of their tender years—the Lady Mary at twelve being fourteen at least in appearance—were charming in floating draperies of white and silver, and white and gold respectively, pearl fillets binding their curls and silk sandals their feet. Princess Mary was an adorable slim whiteness, an ideal nymph (as may be seen to-day in her portrait as Artemis by Sir Peter), while chubby Anne resembled a plump Cupid!

Everybody went a-borrowing jewels. Conscience-tricken Mrs. Blagge, who thought play-acting most sinful, torn between her dismay at finding herself on what would now be called the amateur stage, and her devotion to the young Duchess her mistress, was literally blazing from head to foot. My black pearls and Frances's white ones were pressed into the service among the contents of many other jewel-boxes; and indeed the York maids, a pretty set of girls (though Mrs. Villiers and Mrs. Sedley did not increase the standard of beauty!) seldom looked more fascinating. Mrs. Betterton coached them, and several men of quality danced in the ballet beside his Grace, first-rate dancing being a sine qua non.

As the rehearsals were prolonged for weeks, and, the dresses being gaily donned as soon as they were ready, repairs shortly began to be called for, and my handmaidens were at once in request, since many of the rehearsals took place at Whitehall. This meant that we were an unusually young and light-hearted company, as most of the St. James's Household seemed almost to live at the palace for the time being. Even

the Duchess, though leading, perforce, a quiet life just then and debarred from Court fatigues, was nearly always present, a deeply interested spectator. Her lively Italian wit made her an excellent critic; the King thought it all far more amusing than most plays; and Master Crowne, who had owed his chance to the dispute between my lords Buckingham and Rochester, was recompensed for his heroic endeavours by thus being made the fashion.

Rochester was very amusing.

"Poor Crowne," he remarked to me, leaning over the back of my chair in a quiet corner at one of the earlier performances. "My partisanship has pitted him against Dryden—no great task, that! But, Madame Stuart—and you know what virtue my pen can feign when it chooses!—defend me from having to compose a nursery version of the story of Jupiter and Calisto for these dear babes to play." He waved an elderly benevolent hand towards the troupe of young men and maidens. "My nun, could you have so wrapped up that tale as to render it decent? No, nor I. Between you and me" (a whisper and a lifted eyebrow), "*has* he? Yet there's our prince of Puritans, John Evelyn, so fully satisfied, that he has been able to persuade Mrs. Blagge to stop praying between *some* of her speeches, and our charming Duchess thinks all is well, even the Duke allows his daughters to take part without a word. 'Tis a pretty sight, egad. We've a sober gallant—but I like her shape—in our Baroness Jupiter, eh? And there goes that young villain James with a flower in his mouth, carrying his innocent lamb as in his own saintly portrait."

"Villain yourself, my lord!" I cried. "Who's John Wilmot to go blackening any lamb's wool? Such a smutty sheep as yourself——"

Rochester laughed beside me. "Agreed, I'm past

washing. But to make Monmouth look even grey will need all your bleaching, I take it. Why are you so kind to that young man? You were always hard on me, my fair mistress; hard of heart as—h'm—hard of hand, and I am so tame in your presence nowadays. I perch on your finger and sing cradle songs with Crowne (Zooks, but I'm a canary now!) but there, I can't please you."

I looked up and met the sidelong glint in the wicked grey eyes and the seductive smile that lit the pale thin face. I held up a finger as if for him to alight on; he stooped and kissed it. "I do think I am too kind to you," I said meditatively, "but you have no need to abuse James, good lack, *I* know him well enough! You're but throwing soot down that chimney, you should look to the sweeping of your own."

"This is what she calls being too kind to me," remarked my lord to the ceiling. "Save me from her cruelty then, kind gods!"

I gave him a little rap on the arm with my jewelled fan-holder. "You do not know what cruelty is; we're all far too good to you, yes, from His Majesty down. There is but one who does you hurt, my young friend, it is from him alone you should ask to be saved."

He met my grave look and was serious in an instant.

"Not too hard a riddle to read," he replied, bending till his lips were close to my ear. "You know, oh yes, you know. Who's going to save John Wilmot from Lord Rochester? Tell me."

I shook my head, as serious as he, but "Would you be saved if you could?" I asked pertinently.

"Now, I wonder," smiled John Wilmot Lord Rochester; "I wonder, now!"

Busy as I was superintending repairs and renewals

of all that fine gear, I made leisure to devote to a visitor. My past life, much of it spent in the North, yielded me a Scottish goddaughter of French extraction, a young girl of the name of Hélène Pourvois. Of her I was very fond, and it delighted me to have the chance of giving her the pleasure of a few days' gaiety under the Royal roof that winter; and on her coming to the town with her parents for a short time, they entrusted her to me. It was just before the opening night of the Masque, and London was at its darkest and coldest, but inside Whitehall all was merry-making and light, and my snug lodgings, if they looked upon a grey river through whirling snow, seemed but the cosier for the contrast. It was a joy to me to have a girl under my wing, to give her a glimpse of our gay life to which by now I felt well used, to make a pet of her, dress her pretty fair hair in the newest curls tied with Martial ribbons, to anticipate Christmas by a length of white sarsnet woven with little silken flower-wreaths, to be made into a dancing gown for wearing over a beautiful pale green satin petticoat of her own. This task my woman, with a little aid from the sewing-maids, found very much to her taste, and accomplished at exceedingly short notice. Frances Richmond walked in one morning unannounced, the prettiest figure in her riding-dress, her long black velvet coat laced with silver, her plumed hat set jauntily at the Monmouth cock on her lovely head.

"Why, my dear woman, what puppet are you dressing now?" she cried, regarding us half submerged in billows of millinery. Then, as I presented Hélène to her, she said kindly: "A goddaughter? ha! as good as a daughter any day, with all the pleasure and none of the trouble, eh? Welcome, Mrs. Pourvois. So your forbears hailed from my dear France? Let us go back there, shall we? There are times when

I weary of this triste England!" and she gave a laughing shiver.

"For shame, Duchess!" I exclaimed, "you're none so French as all that. And now poor sweet Madame Henriette is gone, methinks the Court of the Sun-King may show less light than our foggy Whitehall, when all's said and done. But I want this child to do credit to her ancestry. Come, we must ape Versailles. Give us your help; you have the latest notions at your finger-tips. 'Tis a vastly modish silk, is it not?—they swore it was brought over by the last packet. We are thinking of setting a berthe about the shoulders of green gauze to match the petticoat, under a network of these crystals—see, in the French style; or is that fashion past? Advise us."

Frances threw her whip and gloves on to the hearth-rug and entered whole-heartedly into the game. "There, that is the very newest," she affirmed, with her head on one side. "Mademoiselle, I have a pair of crystal-embroidered gloves *made* for this dress—do me the honour of wearing them to-morrow night. No, I'll take no denial; they are all unfitted to my black plumage. That green—the very shade our little Monmouth always affects. Have you a pair of silk stockings to match it, now? No, then we had better borrow from him!"

"With all my heart," said a merry voice at the outer door, which (so like Frances!) she had left unlatched. "Fifty pairs! But for whom? Let me in, cousin; 'tis too cold outside for a poor hind in rags," and in walked the Principal Shepherd, crook in one hand, battered old hat in the other, his boyish face one mischievous smile, his gay eyes roving instantly from the Duchess and me to the new-comer. "Your servant, my fair lady. Is it for you her Grace would borrow my stockings? Sure, she's

monstrous indelicate! Cousin Stuart, present me properly, and then I shall get on better with my lendings."

The impudence of him! But for such as he my charge was, in Northern language, quite able. She curtsied with a serious mouth, only her eyes laughed.

"My lord Duke, I would need to be a centipede to avail myself of your fifty pairs. And if we are to deal with so many, of a truth there's safety in numbers, and no one should blush. Her Grace did but think my skirts matched your hose, I take it."

Monmouth regarded the pretty preparations spread over my tables, the blossoming silks, the pale apple-green satin, the cobwebs of trellised crystals (dew-hung gossamer on a May morning), with deep interest. He touched the latter with an appreciative finger. "These clever dames have a rare taste," he confided to Hélène; "and as for my lady of Richmond, she loves dressing her friends just as she used to do her dolls—not so long ago. Duchess, I swear you played with puppets till you married, and now you come to help Madame Stuart play with ——" ("Just as I said, "interpolated Frances)—"with something prettier than any puppet!" he went on irrepressibly. "Now, ladies, consult me. I was in France not long since. Fighting?—but I had time for other affairs, be sure, and I can handsomely assist you," and his crook and hat kept Frances's whip and gloves company on the hearthrug, at the word.

"James," I cried sharply, but laughing in spite of myself, "out with you! We cannot be plagued this morning; my door should have been shut" ("Then *why* was it open?" objected Monmouth!) "and you intrude upon women's matters. Take your sheep to another fold; this is my lamb. You want nothing here."

"I am dropping to pieces," explained James with

pathos, drawing down the corners of his impudent mouth like a child about to cry. "My smock falls off me—behold!" and he extended a firm young arm from which the ragged shift was indeed hanging in ribbons. "I came in for a stitch or two, cousin, if only to keep out the snow, and spare your blushes later. Mademoiselle says we do not blush, remember!" He perched himself half sitting on one corner of the table and swung a shapely leg in much-darned hose, his glance roving admiringly to the fresh face, his manner, if easy, yet untinged with insolence—merely the bearing of a light-hearted schoolboy pleased to meet a new playfellow!—James as always, unalterable, incurable, uncrushable, sure (too sure) of his welcome at all times and in all seasons.

"You'll bid me to stay," he remarked to Mrs. Pourvois; "or if they cast me out, you will take pity on me, and sit with me in the ante-room. Leave your silly gown! That doth not matter."

"It is most important to me," she replied quietly. "If I have no dress, I shall not be at the ball to-morrow night."

"If you are cruel to me you will lack a partner!" he cried pettishly, his under lip projecting as did Charles's when vexed. She was in no wise dismayed; if he thought that he was going to daunt a hitherto unknown débutante with his august displeasure, he was entirely mistaken.

"Yes, your Grace," she said, "possibly. But as I should not have counted you among them in anticipation I shall be none the poorer now," and she dropped him a little révérence and returned to her finery.

Monmouth still sat on the table-edge, a foot swinging, lips apart, intensely surprised. Frances and I by the window, shaking with suppressed amusement, stood regarding the little scene.

"Hoity-toity," said the Duchess softly. "The ad-

mixture of Huguenot and Scottish blood makes for fire, it seems. Hath she not put him down fairly? James, my poor lad, truth will out: we only dance with you from pity, and not always then! You and I will sit staidly in a corner and comfortably quiz the giddy folk. Let us leave these industrious people to the fashioning of that all-important toilette; I bid you dine with me this afternoon—if you present yourself at my back-door in that gear my scullions will give you a hatful of broken meats, I don't doubt!" and she took him by the arm and walked him out of my rooms. I heard her voice change in the corridor. "Jamie, Jamie, we're not all for your whistle, silly boy. Leave that little maid alone, do you hear?"

Hélène Pourvois turned to me as the door shut on them. "I fear me I was unmannerly, but he—he seemed so sure of me. Is he always thus, godmother?"

"Always, generally more so," I said with a dash of bitterness. "He thinks himself irresistible—well he may. To see him is to love him (nay, I can't tell you why, but I understand it myself), and he knows it; he has but to ask and have, sometimes he hath no need to ask! He's very, very handsome, Hélène, he's rich, he's charming, he's the King's son."

"He is a husband," returned Hélène, seriously, straightforwardly, with a little frown. This was so unlike Whitehall that I laughed.

"Is he? Ask him! He'll tell you he has forgotten whether he is or no, everybody forgets. But you remember, and you've put him in his place. Don't be sorry, my dear; I'm glad. He needs it. But I warrant you that to-morrow night you will have him sueing ever so humbly for a dance."

Her face was slightly troubled. "You do not wish for him as a partner? the finest dancer at Court?" I asked.

She hesitated, smiling. "I would like it hugely," she said slowly, "but I do not want him to wish for me."

"Refuse him!" I suggested. "'Twould be wholesome discipline, James doth not realise the word 'No.' Teach him what it means, Hélène."

The next night there was no rehearsal for once. The great Banqueting Hall was a blaze of light; it was a big ball. I had donned my finest gown, a pale grey velvet bordered with grey fur, over a petticoat of faint mauve satin, and I wore my pearls and had borrowed the Carey amethysts: a clasp, a pendant, pear-shaped earrings.

Mrs. Pourvois' white and green was most becoming, and the Duchess of Richmond's embroidered gloves set it off rarely. She had a beautiful old single earring, a Cavalier relic, formed of one long irregular table-cut diamond and several smaller, on a gold ring, and I made her wear this among the curls on her forehead—all mighty fine. But when a laughing mischievous page handed a box in at my door an hour or so before the ball, a box that, tied with green ribbons and addressed to my goddaughter, proved to contain an exquisite pair of green silk stockings with diamond clocks, why it had less success than it merited. We looked at it and at each other—h'm!

"My dear," I said, "this is Whitehall, remember. Take everything as it comes. Accept these, yes. But do not wear them! I think that will be a sufficient set-down for the donor."

So the pretty feet appeared in her own plain white hose above the high-heeled green shoes, and the extravagant gift lay folded as it came in its dainty coffer.

At the more stately of the palace balls the first

part of the evening was given over to dances in which the immediate Court circle took part, including such official visitors as might be gracing Whitehall—travelling Royalties, ambassadors, and so forth; famed dancers, new beauties, prominent favourites, and such-like minor constellations shone among the fixed stars at times, but the rest of the company looked on a while and took the floor rather later. Also the newer dances were introduced at the beginning of the evening, usually by selected exponents of the art. More or less in the background myself where Court life generally was concerned, my début had won for me, rightly or wrongly, a name and fame as a dancer which frequently drew me out to take a share in the opening measures; that night I rather hoped I might not be required, but there was no escape. The King sent me a command by Mr. Sidney, and as soon as the ball opened that gallant was bowing before me. An old galliard of Elizabeth's time had been ordered by the Queen. She was aware that I was familiar with it, indeed, we had all practised it hard, if informally, one night at Windsor, Mrs. Gwyn coaching us.

Nelly herself was present, a pretty-looking figure in airy pink and white, with Lord Arran for partner. She smiled broadly and kissed her hand to Harry Sidney and me as we swept out from the circle of onlookers to our places in the centre of the shining floor.

I had but time to leave Hélène under the wing of the nearest lady—lean, lively, brilliant Katherine Crofts, gorgeous in red and gold—only trusting that wing might not be spread for flight ere I returned. Lord Arran was bidden to lead out Nelly; that was one thing to the good!

The music struck up. The King and his fair Louise, languid and rather weary-looking in bronze

velvet and emeralds, took their places; Queen Catherine, more vivacious than usual in a lovely dress of silver and pearl embroideries, was handed forth by the Duke of York. ("Oh lud!" cried Nelly audibly, "he don't know the steps, where will he land us all before we've done?") Then a few more couples—but no Monmouth. I had no time to look for him, the old dance took all my attention; it was indeed a whole comedy that the performers had to play, "Difference and Reconciliation." I had a magnificent partner; not for nothing was he still known as Beau Sidney, and the man who looked too high in the sixties was as sure of his successes in the seventies, and as a dancer always in the first rank. As a matter of fact, his Highness was, in modern language, our only passenger, and, I fear, had been included merely as a target for his brother's ribald mirth. James of York was indeed the exception to the rule in that family of perfect dancers; even the Queen, little as she looked it, was an admirable performer—she good-naturedly set to work to pilot him as best she might, kindly endeavouring to conceal her smiles. Nobody has ever given Catherine credit for possessing a sense of humour, but very little that was funny ever escaped her, as I always noticed, hard indeed as she sometimes found it to laugh, and again, hard not to do so on other occasions, such as this.

In that portion of the dance where the ladies had to feign coldness, and retreat, shrugging disdainful shoulders, their backs to their pleading gallants, I caught sight of some one slipping belatedly through the crowd and drew my breath sharply—Monmouth, in a coat of white flowered sarsnet and breeches of green satin!

I rapped out a modish little oath quite involuntarily, it would have seemed all too mild to the great Tudor Queen, but it was accepted as an artistic addition to

my rôle by Mr. Sidney, who redoubled his histrionic ardour.

His fair face, with its chiselled features, was set off by a great golden peruke as opulent as was his Grace of Bucks', and much more becoming, his lavender suit accorded perfectly with my grey and mauve, his jewels far outshone most ladies' present, his air was perfection—certainly he was a cavalier to be proud of. He threw himself into his part with admirable fervour, pursued, despaired, plucked up heart again, pleaded in dumb show, till, for all my divided attention, I was drawn to the very verge of laughter. "Sir, sir," I whispered, "spare me. I was never so hard-hearted—I relent! But my attention is perforce abroad to-night."

"That is the cruellest speech you could have made me!" lamented Harry Sidney, sotto voce. "Kind from the lips outward, but the false heart is another's—even those bright eyes stray. Am I too repulsive to look at sometimes, Madame?"

I brought my gaze back to his—'Le beau' had not often to complain that his ladies looked elsewhere. "Pish!" I said, below my breath, "you're as pretty as a picture, and you do not want me to tell you so, my fine man!"

He put on an agonised expression and clapped his hand to his heart, the music ebbed and flowed, drew us apart and swept us together once more. My steps halted, I glanced back at him over my shoulder, sank almost to the floor, gave him my hand and a smile, and he bent over me till his curls touched my shoulder. "My eyes only stray on business," I murmured; "can you think they go on pleasure?" and again I nearly laughed outright, wondering if my whispered passages with this spoiled courtier had not as much acting in them as the artificial love-making of Royal Eliza's day.

"Be wary, from prudence's point of view do not roam, Madame; 'tis not safe to-night, our great Admiral seems to be fairly adrift just now, he will run us down in a moment!" and hardly was the warning given than the Duke, entirely losing his way in the concluding movement, wandered helplessly across our road, turned abruptly, and collided with the couple ahead, cannoning off into me with such force that I only retained my balance by a supreme effort. My partner made a swift rush to my rescue and shot a somewhat dangerous glance at his Highness—no need to recall the old difference between these two men; only King Charles's openly expressed intention of having Henry Sidney at Court forced James to tolerate his late rival's presence.

I made a quick step between them with a hurried apology: "My clumsiness, Highness! Forgive me, I was directly in your way." (So I was, simply because he was out of his own! but anything to avert an awkward incident.) A swift glance past James's lowering countenance revealed the fact that the King's part of the dance was also held up by His Majesty's coming to a standstill, hands on hips, head back, to give way to a most unkind fit of laughter! Truly if I had poured oil on troubled waters the King had set it alight, unless James could be persuaded that his brother was laughing at me. I stooped to the floor, succeeded in entangling a high French heel in the lace of my petticoat and revealing the snare all in one movement.

"See, sir, you must blame these frills and fallals, and excuse their wearer." The sulky face cleared, the danger was averted, and I had made it plain to Mr. Sidney that I for one was determined to avoid friction with the Duke at all costs. As he led me to my seat again I said very low in his ear: "Thank you; you must remember we are neighbours, the Duke

and I, our lodgings are side by side. Walls are thin, my friend, when enemies lie adjacent, and peace is far to seek. But I do think I have ruined my best petticoat much too cleverly."

"Ah, Madame, I warned you," smiled Harry. "You were too far away!"

"I was, indeed," I replied cryptically, "yet not far enough."

I sat down on my gilded seat and looked about me. No Mistress Crofts, no Hélène, no Monmouth. I bit back another exclamation—more in the Tudor manner. My companion leant an exquisite sleeve on the back of my chair and put up his glass at the passing company.

"I wish," I said to myself, with an eye on his admirable legs elegantly disposed beside my skirts, "I wish every man in the world were at the bottom of the sea, silk stockings and all!"

The flashing company swayed about us—lovely women in the entrancing full dress and sunning-over curls of the period moved to and fro, skirts flowing, yet short enough in the under-petticoat to reveal English feet then supposed to be the prettiest in the world, sleeves loose and lace-ruffled, fairest setting for a rounded arm, pointed stomachers that made slenderer still a slim waist, jewels about white throats or slung across white shoulders, artlessly artful patches, the newest ceruse and pearl-powder, gold and brown dust for all middle-aged tresses save mine, so early grey. If I were unabashed by winter's snows in my midsummer it was because I knew it for a family trait; as Frances had said—did we Stuarts not all go grey early? Why, even among Monmouth's own crisp curls, revealed by the Principal Shepherd, I had pounced upon a white hair not a week back, and had fairly laughed him out of countenance! Frances herself had a faded lock in her luxuriant coiffure,

tucked out of sight, though I had urged her to be brave and let it be seen. . . . The white feather—was it that we showed so soon? . . . The thought flashed through my mind (a little shiver following in its wake) and was gone at once.

"Madame, you must be in love, I fear!" (Oh, this was Mr. Sidney in my ear again!)

"Out of it, sir, I vow," I retorted sharply, and rose. "But your pardon. Out of humour, of manners, I think. I'm plaguy dull to-night, and at best my head cannot compete with my heels." Neither could his, but it was not for me to say so! "But I have missed my young guest, and she is new to Whitehall ways."

Old St. Albans was bowing on the other side of my chair; he had just led back Mrs. Crofts to hers. "Mrs. Pourvois is in good hands, Madame Stuart; our pretty Monmouth took her out." I flashed a glance at Katherine.

"Not to dance," I contradicted. "They took no part in the past measure."

Mrs. Crofts laughed shrewdly and her dark eyes sparkled. "They went for the orange court," she suggested. "Madame is"—she paused on a word that did not begin with an "a," and added—"anxious?" She turned to the lady next her. "We seek our naughty boy," she said lightly. "He hath kidnapped Madame Stuart's fair charge, and, knowing him so well" (the black eyes returned to mine and were pointedly dropped), "some one ought to volunteer for a search party."

The lady addressed moved slightly with a rustle of Royal blue taffeta. I looked at her, and saw it was (of all people) Jane Middleton, Eleanor Needham's lovely elder sister. She regarded us both none too pleasantly, and tossed her exquisite fair head in silence. Katherine Crofts laughed afresh. "We *all*

know him so well," she amended; "do we not? I, who brought him up, Madame Stuart, who continues his tuition, Mistress Middleton, who *nowadays* gives him sound advice, to be sure?"

Little barbed arrows flew from that clever tongue—Jane had nothing to say, I determined to say nothing. The next dance struck up, the beauty and her attendant floated away to take part in it, Mrs. Crofts and Lord St. Albans once more retired to their secluded ante-room off the great hall. Mr. Sidney, still imperturbably smiling, made a leg and left me!

I was free, for a moment at least, from all those chattering imbeciles. I caught up my train, threaded my way through the crowd as nimbly as Monmouth had done a while since; I would search the orange court (one of the larger ante-chambers, decorated with orange trees in porcelain pots, lit with Oriental lamps of golden glass like larger oranges, and hung with yellow draperies), and then, failing in my quest, the smaller, most dimly lit and discreetly curtained alcoves around, and the galleries above.

" 'Tis lucky I have no daughter," I said to myself grimly, "or I should need a switch. I'faith, may one beat a goddaughter? I've a mind to try. The gipsy, pretending she would repulse him—and James, that one cannot trust round the corner with a penny piece!" . . .

"Godmother, you are looking for me? Here I am," said a young, soft voice at my elbow, and I turned round upon as pretty a sight as I had viewed for a long time, a spring picture in truth, white and palest green with tiny touches of pink and violet and golden yellow, two youthful figures clad alike in these April hues—my tall fair Scottish lass, and at her side the slender form, erect as a lance, in all the bravery of his dark good looks, of his scapegrace of Monmouth. She was smiling collectedly, a mis-

chievous smile which showed an unexpected dimple, her hand resting lightly on his, he, with his lips set rather firmly, had his eyes bent on hers with an expression in them that I had never before seen there, best to be described as one of puzzled respect, not unmixed with surprise. He laid her hand in mine with a funny little gesture as of reluctantly restoring something valuable intact. Then he spoke: "Your goddaughter, Madame, tells me she is making no long stay here. I am sorry; we should be the better for more of such company. But Whitehall, as I know too well, is less the place for her than the chaste North, and Whitehall is the loser."

He bowed and left us, with the air of one shutting a door where no door was!

I needed no explanation, and she gave none; we met each other's eye with understanding and a comprehensive smile, the sort of smile that recapitulates half an hour's conversation; and together we passed back into the ball-room. A disconsolate figure leaned against the doorpost, a very brave one, gayest of the gay in rose-colour, that of the gallant young soldier comrade of his Grace, Colonel John Churchill. I knew perfectly well what that long face meant. Sarah Jennings, already occupying his whole horizon, was in one of her wilful moods and smiled elsewhere that night, or smiled not at all. Suppressing my amusement I made some trivial remark and then presented him to my charge. He looked a trifle more cheerful, pulled himself together, and led her out for the contredanse just beginning. I took his place in the doorway with a frank sigh.

"Oh, heartbreak!" said a soft voice beside me, "and how can that be, since Madame Stuart has no heart?"

Rochester, slight, subtly fascinating, cool as ice, was at my elbow, his pale face paler than ever, his

dress superb—a black velvet and silver brocade lined with flame-colour, a purple shoulder-knot, a sword-belt of silver tissue and fringes. He put up an apprising glass at my protégée as she moved off with handsome Jack Churchill.

"Devilish pretty wench," he said coolly, as if to himself. "But, Madame, my apologies are as yet unmade. I am only this moment come upon this enchanting scene. My rascally tailor but now sent home my fine new coat—yes, 'tis mighty handsome; I knew it would please you—and I felt it wise not to appear in my shirt, the rest of my wardrobe being, they tell me, on the bailiff's backs. I hastened the knavish snip, but he swore by all his gods that his Grace James must have a new suit he had ordered him to make within twenty-four hours—*must*, MUST—and, as you may infer, I and my commands went to the wall. I never pay because I cannot. James never pays because he can, he gives Charles's promises to pay for him; and so, my lady, you see me late. A vastly taking suit, James's, is it not? I should have fancied Her Majesty's sempstresses were responsible for it, myself, it seemed to me to have had its origin in your part of the palace, its twin hailed thence, eh? Your fair charge, Madame—by the way, why was I not presented?"

"I judged Colonel Churchill the wiser choice," I remarked, with my gaze fixed on the tip of my shoe. "He is so safe, so sedate an escort these days. In my town, my lord, we have the trick of reducing men to obedience, apparently."

Rochester grinned. "You're a desperate set of fair tyrants in St. Albans, Madame; but do you not think you have me sufficiently cowed to be as trustworthy as your tame knave in the white and green coat? But he, I incline to think, has been given for ever the freedom of your demesne."

My eyes met his, almost with the clash of steel. "You will incline to think otherwise at my bidding," I said levelly—he bowed, and made a little apologising gesture with a delicate thin hand—"and the Duke knows, as you do, how far he may go with me and mine. Come, my dear lord, come! Do not always be forcing me to draw a line and to show you exactly where I have drawn it. And Mrs. Pourvois would not amuse you, Rochester; she's a good girl from the country."

"Not so long ago," remarked his lordship, "you came from the country yourself, a good woman! and I can assure your ladyship you amuse me very much!" We both laughed; indeed it was impossible not to, his tone was so quaint.

"Neither by my great wit, my acquired Court manner, nor my imperishable beauty," I retorted sardonically, "but by that rustic air that still hangs about me, then?"

"By none of those things," answered my lord with a complete change of expression. "Forgive my plain speaking, I love your pretty sermons, your warnings with uplifted finger, your grave looks; I laugh, Madame, but I want to keep your friendship, the friendship of a decent woman. Never take it from me."

There was a little pause, he held out his hand for my carved ivory fan, possessed himself of it, and began to fan me slowly and deliberately. "You're safe," he said. "They know you and they know me! I cannot blacken you and you cannot whiten me, alas, nor can you even turn James to grey. But do you be my ally as well as his and Charles's. I'll plague you no more. *They* will. James will wear you out and Charles will sell you if he gets a chance."

I silenced him. "See here," I said steadily, "leave out the King. You know what he is to you and to

the rest of you (forgive *my* plain speech now); you do not know what he can be to us dull pious folk. You know what he is not—my lover, you know James is no lover of mine, just as truly as you know, Lord Rochester, that you are not my lover yourself." He tried to interrupt me and I stopped him. I cut short a sudden conventional rush of protest, a vow, a hand stretched to mine. "Don't spoil it!" I said, with a little rueful pleading look. "Be a good friend to *me*."

He gazed curiously into my face, the same sort of expression that I had seen in Monmouth's when he looked at my goddaughter rested an instant in his eyes. "By Heaven, I will!" swore John Wilmot Lord Rochester.

He never was, perhaps! but he was never my enemy. He went on laughing at me when I tried to help him, for I did try. It was not to me he wrote those exquisite verses of the lover who seeks light in his darkness from his lady's lamp, but once, in his rarely serious moments, he did quote the last line to me:

"Ah, what's thy light the less for lighting mine?"

He was in the outer dark for good, he was past help, but I liked him from the beginning and I liked him to the end. I never lost him except by death—and that's not losing a man.

IN LIGHTER VEIN

CHAPTER XI

IN LIGHTER VEIN

TO S. J. C.

"Friend, of my infinite dreams
Little enough endures,
Little howe'er it seems,
It is yours, all yours.
Fame hath a fleeting breath—
Hopes may be frail or fond—
But Love shall be Love till death,
And perhaps beyond!"

A. C. Benson.

The early spring of 1675 brought to the town Sophia Carey, my friend.

Her husband had seen much fighting abroad, but during that year he quitted the service for a post under Government; this brought them at once to London, and they were shortly established in a pretty house in Westminster. (Later in our lives they had a beautiful country villa in the village of Kensington, close to that of "Don Dismallo," my good Lord Nottingham, but not until King William and Queen Mary were on the throne and Kensington House became a Royal Palace. The Careys were friends of that King and Queen, and played no small part at their Court.) They were frequently at Whitehall from the time of their first coming to London—she, especially, was constantly in my lodgings from the very beginning, and was soon on a charmingly easy footing with both the King and Monmouth, receiving much kindness from Queen Catherine.

Fortune indeed smiled on me then. I used to wonder if I had not better sacrifice some cherished possession to the gods and avert their jealousy of my happiness. It was not necessary. Much indeed was I to lose, but not that friendship.

Memories of my life at Whitehall into which you, Madame Carey, entered largely, are as strong as any others. Vignettes, the little isolated scenes, what I call mind-pictures, compose these, as well as longer and greater happenings that more nearly resemble la Baronne d'Aulnoy's tales. There is one—I should think it took place not so very long after my establishment in my lodgings there. A chilly evening, a blazing fire in the grate of my withdrawing-room, an idle hour for the King, and a call on me, waiting, already dressed, to attend in the great reception rooms, for some musical party, a dance, a night at cards, the entertaining of some foreign ambassadors—which, I cannot now recall. I remember His Majesty in his usual chair with his back more or less to the door, "at an angle of forty-five" from the fire, clad in his usual black satins, his long silk-stockinged legs out in front of him, his red-heeled shoes just crossed, his hands on the arms of his chair, somewhat sunk back altogether into it—a characteristic attitude. You came to see me not long after his arrival, and finding who was with me, stood protesting (I can hear you now!) in the ante-room, until Charles recognised your voice and ordered you to come in too!

I was seated on the other side of the fire, in mouse-coloured velvet, a cluster of cardinal-red and purple ribbons on my bodice, which was fastened down the front with red stone crévés, garnets or cabochon carbuncles. In you came and sat in another high-backed chair between Charles and me, almost

opposite the fire—mine was just such a one—and there was Monmouth's square padded stool between us. Your dress was charming, periwinkle blue silks with a good deal of lace round the shoulders, twisted about them and held up (and caught with it) by strings of the Carey amethysts, and you had a beautiful amethyst hanging from a string of pearls round your neck; your pretty brown hair was done rather like mine, but with fewer and larger curls, and none dangling on your shoulders, and there was a strand of blue ribbon in it and an amethyst buckle. You had purple velvet shoes, I mouse-colour, with red heels. We both had painted chicken-skin fans. (Does all this weary you? I love to see it!) Charles and I carried on the usual duel of words, knocking sparks out of each other like flint and steel; I was much more witty then than I am now.

Hardly were we settled than in came some one else—that creature who, wherever he was, always got permission to go everywhere, Monmouth—who, on getting past my entry door, lost no time in coming forward and kneeling down, upright, on the stool between your chair and mine, holding on to the back of each chair and looking at us serenely, one after the other—certain of his welcome—always "the most pretty spark" as of old. He was wearing a foxy-red velvet coat, his Star embroidered on it, white knee-breeches and silk stockings, and black shoes with silver bows and heels.

His father of course attacked him rallyingly at once, and asked him how he dared intrude thus? Monmouth characteristically replied he had come to pay his homage to his elders and betters. Charles and I were enchanted; as for you, you could not stop laughing.

Charles said, "Betters, it is understood, but *elders?* to *ladies,*" and added, "Poor James, you're to be pitied,

with that plain face of yours, but you always have tact, and that's better than beauty any day," and Monmouth just went on smiling charmingly at us and picked up a hand off my lap and one off yours, and kissed them in turn to ask our pardon.

He did not attempt to answer back, he knew he couldn't, and just knelt and looked more delightful than ever, and you and I laughed till we were out of breath. Charles knew we loved him, just as he loved him himself, and nobody could make Monmouth cross; and then Charles said something else distinctly Caroline, and you and I pretended to put up our fans and hide our blushes, and Monmouth suggested mildly that of course we weren't his elders, but his father was certainly his better, only he himself claimed to be wiser, which made the King chuckle for about five minutes. (He had a way of shaking all over, silently, a trait I have seen inherited.)

Of course it was not to be expected that we should be left thus unofficially alone for long: the faithful Bruce, new to his task—a very long broom that swept most conscientiously clean!—was shortly heard whispering with my maid outside, and entered to see if he were needed.

"Dear Thomas, he won't let me out of his sight," said Charles with pretended resignation. "He is like a hen with a new duckling, he clucks on the bank and I—well, I stand head downwards and dabble in the mud."

"Sir, sir, what about tact?" cried Monmouth (and in the language of to-day "got a bit back"). "Are you standing on your head and dabbling in mud here? If you are, you should not say so!"

Bruce couldn't follow quite so fast; you and I, I think, followed almost too quickly, at any rate, for our sense of humour. I had to command my voice to beseech the new "King's gentleman" to sit on

the floor, because he was so tall—his head nearly touched my ceilings (the little Chevalier de St. George said he was the tallest man he had ever seen, Bruce writes this in his own Memoirs); and you said it was "not at all suitable," since it suggested the hen's taking to the water while the duckling remained perched on the bank.

It was quite foolish, but it was all harmless, and at least we laughed innocently over it. There was nothing unkind in our jesting, nothing of the fault-finding that fills the pages of other writers, none of their jealousy, thank Heaven. Oh, that jealousy! My heart aches over it now. It poisoned life at times, as it poisons all life always, and very early in my career I met it, and took steps to avoid as much of it in future as I could. Between you and me, at least, such a thing was unknown.

I remember, my dear Madame Carey, another occasion when you and I were in my bedroom. You and my woman were helping me try on a new mantua—such a pretty one, of dove-coloured mohair trimmed with narrow copper lace and fringes, and quaint fat coppery bows and roses, with a hood lined with pansy velvet, to be worn over a pansy silk gown very simply made in long flowing lines, but clasped with a beautiful big ornament of wrought gold set with square amethysts and sapphires. You were in a charming simar[1] of chestnut watered tabby, over a prune velvet dress trimmed with narrow bands of brown fur and heavy Venetian guipure of a warm ivory shade; the same ivory hue lined your hood.

I had just put the new mantua on and had come to the conclusion that it was really rather nice but

[1] A cloak with long sleeves.

that I should never be able to afford anything more for *years,* when there was a commotion in my little ante-room, and my maid came back giggling to say his Grace was without, and he was very sorry to hear Mistress Stuart was dressing, because, anyhow, he was coming in!

In he came on the maid's heels, looking enchanting, with a scarlet cloth coat embroidered with his Star, and all the rest of his attire black (and a scarlet roquelaure flung anyhow on a chair outside).

"Dressing? my cousin, I call that *dressed!*" he said, kissing my hand and giving it a little shake. "How much more is Madame going to put on?" to you, kissing your hand in turn and walking all round me to see.

"Mighty fine! You two ladies are off on some mischievous errand, and I have just come to keep you out of it. No, it's of no use resisting, my coach is below. I am going to wait on the Duchess of York, and you shall come too. I'll take no denial!"—and we were swept off before we had time to protest, and found ourselves in the great gilded coach with Monmouth opposite us looking his naughtiest.

"'Twill do my pious uncle all the good in the world to see you," he chuckled; "and as for the Duchess, poor child, 'twill cheer her up. Sad? No, not as sad as you or I would be with his Highness, *always* with us—what am I saying? You will subdue the exuberance of her youthful spirits, and you may even succeed in making the Lady Anne talk!"

"Not while you are there, James," I said. "Mr. Dryden hath assured posterity you never say much—he does not know you as I do, poor man. But we have no audience with the Duchess, and you will find us penetrating no farther than the courtyard of St. James's."

"I'll wager you that in half an hour from now we shall all be sitting on the floor playing 'I love my love with an A.' 'Tis what I am bidden there for—I am well known at the game," and he looked at you more naughtily than ever.

"Not only with an A," you said, "but with all the other letters of the alphabet, sir," and we all laughed, Monmouth remarking, "In truth one begins with an A, *I* did!" This allusion to Anna ought to have been rebuked, but reduced me to further mirth.

Monmouth's idea on arriving at St. James's, in and out of which he ran as he pleased, was to lead us, by a hand of each, straight into the Duchess's apartments, but we both sternly refused; I was not going to run the risk of a snub from cousin James of York, nor was I going to make Mary of Modena think us two feather-heads wanting in respect. I did not know her intimately, and you had only been presented to, and waited upon her once or twice. She had not been married for so very long, and had not yet been seen in public much.

All the same, had I taken Monmouth's wager, I should have lost, for we found ourselves playing the identical game within a few minutes of our cordial reception—his Highness was somewhat luckily absent—by the Duchess, Princess Mary and Princess Anne, Elizabeth Villiers, Sarah Jennings, Catherine Sedley, wittiest of us all—and we were none of us fools save little Lady Anne, who always had to be "helped!"—Monmouth, Lord Rochester, who was too dreadfully funny—he and Cathie Sedley said outrageous things which were quite too much for you and me, and left Monmouth able to do nothing but throw back his head and shout with laughter!—dear Lord Ossory, and John Churchill—these, I think, completed the company. The newly married late maid-of-honour, Margaret Blagge, now Madame

Godolphin, came with her husband Sydney in the middle, and her surprised face on seeing our circle on the carpet set me off again—I always tried to shock Margaret Godolphin, and generally succeeded only too well.

Pretty young Mary of Modena, with her white skin, rosy cheeks and lips and black hair, in process of slowly falling in love, a love that lasted beyond death, with her middle-aged husband, was delicious in her faltering English. She had "J," I recollect, and began hesitatingly, looking at Monmouth for assistance. Monmouth, cross-legged beside her, I could hardly take my eyes from, his legs were so beautiful in black silk stockings, black shoes, and red heels.

"I love my love with a J because his name is James," and Monmouth, pretended she meant him, laid his hand on his heart, leapt gracefully ("all of a piece") to his feet, bowed deeply, and was pulled down again by John Wilmot Lord Rochester, amid our peals of laughter and the Duchess's laughing but half-puzzled outcry. Rochester, with a languishing glance interrupted, "Ah, your Highness, I hoped you were going to say John!" and there was more mirth.

"I hate him with a J, because——" she again looked round appealingly.

"Because he makes me jealous," said Rochester in my ear with his eye on Mrs. Sedley, whom, as you know, James of York afterwards made Lady Dorchester. (You recollect her saying to Mary of Orange, when she and William took the throne and Mary snubbed her at Court, "Madame, if I broke one commandment with your father, you broke another against him.")

And so it went on. It was more than amusing to see the by-play—John Churchill making love to Sarah

all the time when he thought no one was looking, and Sarah tossing her fair head; Monmouth being a perfect child with those children the Ladies Mary and Anne; Rochester pretending he was going to shock you and just stopping in time under my amused but restraining eye; Mary of Modena, as eager as the children to learn how to play, in her white gown and damask-rose-red scarf (she was always delicate, poor girl, and always having babies during those years—she once said, "They were the only five years' happiness I ever knew, and I was having children all the time and lost them all, so judge of that happiness!") Elizabeth Villiers, who was to betray the Lady Mary's friendship for her with William III later on, being quietly but most effectually witty—and less coarse than Catherine Sedley—the Lady Mary, as flushed and as pretty as her young stepmother, giving little gasps of delighted laughter at her own attempts; while the Lady Anne sat with her short fat legs stuck out in front of her, and smiled stolidly and said nothing at all! It was a joy to me to see Monmouth by Mary of Modena, and to note the touch of Italian colouring in him, from his Medici ancestry, echoing her Italian beauty.

All of a sudden in came, quite informally, Charles himself, with Buckingham in attendance—and of course the inevitable Bruce—and he went off into fits of laughter at the sight of us. We really must have looked as if we were in the nursery, we ladies with our full silken skirts swirling round us and our curly heads together, the gentlemen all cross-legged, their magnificent perriwigs nearly to their knees. He would not let us get up.

"No, no, my children, you have no notion how adorable you all look in so lowly a posture," to which I retorted at once—I could not help it—"Sire, it is not so very often we are obliged to look up to you!

Your pardon, Your Majesty, it was not I who said this, 'twas my Lord Rochester whispered it in my ear."

"Madame," retorted Charles, "your impertinence, if not your charm, is beneath my notice," and as Rochester opened his mouth to speak again you and I, on each side of him, took him by an arm and simultaneously said, "Don't say it, my dear lord!" and when he innocently asked, "Don't say what?" we both vowed we had not a notion what he meant to say; but whatever it was, would he please not say it?—we know our John Wilmot too well.

Here the young Bruce in the background went off into a boyish guffaw. "Ah, that is a gentle smile from my little Thomas," remarked Charles, turning to the toweringly tall and still overcome Bruce. "Get me a cushion and I will sit down with these pretty ladies—unless," he looked quizzically round, "any one of them will offer her poor old Sovereign a seat on her knee?"

"I will," suddenly piped up Princess Anne. "Sit on my lap, Uncle Charles!" spreading flat her frock with podgy hands—whereupon I am sorry to say Lord Rochester buried his face in your billowing velvet skirts and *cried* with joy! I know that when he was able to stop wiping his eyes, they had reversed the suggested order of things, Charles was enthroned on a cushion with his small roundabout niece perched on one of his knees, kicking his shin with her little high-heeled shoes at intervals. Buckingham, who was really the funniest person there, was out of humour, and would only bestow his gorgeous blue satins in one of the high-backed chairs.

"Poor George," said Charles, looking up at him, "the floor *is* a long way off for a respectable old gentleman like you," which was cutting, as Buckingham hated to be reminded that he was two years

Charles's senior, nearly as much as he disliked being called respectable.

Here, of course, Monmouth must needs pretend he was overcome with cramp, and besought all the ladies near him to help him up, as he felt he was growing respectable like George, and must leave the floor to such brisk youths as His Majesty, who, as everybody knew, had always been allured by the idea of "a lodging on the cold ground." I thought we were probably getting on thin ice again, and once more stopped Rochester, who in a pained voice said protestingly, "Madame, you have no pity; you will not wait to hear what I say before you object to it! Surely you might know by now that I should disappoint you by a most innocent remark?"

"If you could think of one," from Mrs. Sedley; and "Ah, but our dear John would be so dull in that case that Madame does well to stop him," from Buckingham; to which Rochester, "Surely, no speech of mine can be so dull as your silence, your Grace!" and Mary of Modena had to make peace all round, her efforts being considerably hampered by Monmouth's suggesting the reverse of what she meant to say whenever she paused for an English word, his brown eyes crinkled up as they caught hers.

"Sir, sir," she said, spreading her thin long hands apart with a delightful foreign gesture, "you are so bad, you make me—how is it?—tell what you call—lies!"

"Oh, Highness, his Grace never taught anybody to tell the truth yet, so what does it matter?" "Tell his Grace he is good, your Highness; that is, good-for-nothing;" and so on, and so on, till, "Anne, my lady niece, what would you think of having a King with only one leg? for you will have one soon!" from Charles; and then "Then, Your Majesty, Peter Lely shall paint you as Cleopatra, 'hopping forty paces

through the public streets,' " cried Monmouth, and we were all talking at once till the Duchess gave up in despair. "Oh, James, I do not follow you."

"Leave that to *us*, Highness!" from you (really I can't think why!) to the inextinguishable mirth of Charles and me, who caught each other's eye and gave up all attempt at decorum forthwith.

It is all abjectly silly, but that is what I feel our rollicking high spirits in those days gave us. Monmouth was not only the dissolute young man ever scheming for a crown, nor Charles the elderly satyr always in pursuit of "the female prey"—they were both English gentlemen, pleasant and respectful in their relations with their kinswomen and those whom they knew to be truly virtuous. The times were different—speech was free, the standard of morals low, but I believe in my heart that both Charles and his son[1] were simply natural men who in their heyday were possessed of very strong passions and abounding good health and vitality, practically non-moral, with a pretty woman beckoning at every turn! People seem never to be able to cease raking in the mud of the Restoration Court, for the purpose of throwing it at Charles and Monmouth. I believe that Rochester's verse was often sheer obscenity, but he could write the most purely exquisite gems; and he was funnier at times than words can say, I consider. The delightful mock-heroic pettishness of the following verse of his pleases me as much now as it did then:

> Then talk not of inconstancy,
> False hearts and broken vows,
> If I by miracle can be
> This live-long minute true to thee,
> 'Tis all that Heaven allows.

[1] "Young, and amorous, and of a charming countenance" (Bruce on his friend Monmouth, fifty years later).

(As if Heaven "allowed" anything in the matter!) and:

> 'Tis not that I the thought disown
> Of being yours and yours alone;
> But with what face can I incline
> To damn you to be only mine?

Well, my taste may be Caroline, but I think that most laughable. If Rochester never wrote anything more witty than the one or two letters still extant to his wife, he would be immortal, especially after the one in which he left her "a prey to her own agitations, among his relations, the worst of damnations"—in which sentiment I participate.

Just as one has one's prejudices, for and against, in this life, so I had mine then. Rochester is difficult to write of, because I dare to call him a friend of mine, and yet I was aware then, and am aware now, that he was a dangerous associate for any woman who wished to keep her name unsmirched. The perhaps even more witty Sedley and Dorset never attracted me at all. There was something about Rochester that did so, and I say it frankly. I remember so well the delicate, fragile, almost effeminate face, the cool grey eyes, the full underlip, the utter recklessness of speech and behaviour on most occasions, the perfectly impossible character of much of his writing, yet, (save for that one error, when, a little drunk, he read me a poem he should not have read me, and I, with "Barbarian" directness, slapped his face soundly for it,) he never went farther in my presence than I myself permitted. Apart from the verses I have quoted, his more serious and actually beautiful poems (rare, too rare) still bring tears to my eyes. I recollect how he died and what an edifying end he made, and how proud Bishop Burnet was of his share in it. Poor John Wilmot! We never met after his health finally broke and he left Court; but we corresponded, and every now and

then, through the miseries of a long illness and the painful turning over of the new leaf, flashed stray gleams of that humour which had endeared him to me. I make no boast of a conquest, but Rochester would have loved me in his way had I let him. As it was he did better: after that one slip he respected me, yet he knew me for what I was exactly, though he never guessed my true function at Whitehall.

His contempt for Monmouth's intellect I could excuse, his misapprehension and misunderstanding of the King I laughed at in my heart—it would have been hopelessly dangerous to do it to his face. Yet in one of the last letters he wrote me he said, "Ah, Madame, you, I know now, had the laugh on most of us. You were not the King's companion in his looser life, and we sinners are apt to think that a man is only his true self when he falls—in love or into his cups! I begin (too late) to ask myself if a man is not his real self when he shows at his best? You have been good enough to write very much that sort of sentiment about your humble servant, I know. Now, do you think you knew Rochester better than he did his King? You set both of us up, if not on pedestals, at least on high chairs like puppets told to behave. Charles and I saw each other in the kennel with the other swine. But I ask myself now whether we knew each other better than you knew us? There is one side—there are a dozen sides—of both of us that you, being what you are, could never know, thank God. But you were never a prude, never too cold (I also wonder, Madame, if you could not have done more for some of us sinners if you had chosen to be a little warmer?) Never quite a fool—as we often were, I certainly, because I was clever and thought myself cleverer still, Charles because—partly, I see now, because he was so on purpose. Madame, they tell me I am dying. I only wish they could tell me

I was dead! It is a plaguy business, and damned wearisome. But good Master Burnet worketh over me handsomely and tells me long tales of the joy over the sinner that repenteth. Lord knows I repent!—yet, my lady, I regret too. I would I had been a better man, but there are moments when I am sorry I was not a worse one! I missed some fine sins, I vow; I fancy I had no time to think of everything. Nay, do not throw this sheet aside in disgust. The impact of your fair hand on my face tingles yet, remember. But you have many years, if Heaven is kind, before you. Bethink you of the advice of a rake who has now only to await the good offices of the spade. (So low, you see, has my wit been brought!) Would you not be wiser to be less wise, Madame, or to be wise altogether? Perhaps you smile over this and murmur that you know best. Probably you do. But I wonder if that is right, since I do not think you ever gave any one your heart. And nobody, my dear friend of the brave old days, is ever so foolish as the man or woman who loves too much or does not love enough. Master Burnet will assure you I have forgotten all earthly loves, but I write this to you and not to him. Perhaps had I loved you I should not love you now—you know the ways of Cupid (*do* you?). At least let me assure you that I die faithfully attached to my memories of Madame Stuart. Is that not such a love as pleases you best both to give and receive? But you have no heart—or if you have, you gave it where I never could follow."

Again, poor John Wilmot. He understood so much that I marvel he never understood what to me was so plain. Yet your clever men are sometimes too clever to see the simplest facts. I wept when he died, and

the Court raised cynically amused eyebrows—yes, perhaps I should have been wiser to be less wise or wise altogether. Yet I should have missed that side of Rochester which I knew, and therefore, for myself, I do not regret the line I took. I have gazed long at his miniature by Cooper,[1] and have smiled and wondered whether, wherever he may be now, he is not even wiser than he recommended me to be. I do think it.

[1] And his portrait by Sir Peter Lely, both Jones Collection, South Kensington.

MEN CALL IT LOVE

CHAPTER XII

"MEN CALL IT LOVE!"

"Others have dallied in the shade
That dims the perfect sky,
Others have broken vows they made—
So why not you and I?
And thus we played, as others do,
With hearts tossed to and fro;
Ah, Love, that once for all I knew!
Ah, Love you did not know."

(*Love à la Mode*)
M. N.

THE Scotswoman had come to the English Court, leaving her wine-red hills and burnt-gold rivers, the air like tempered steel, the sunshine soft as heather honey, the North she was never again to see. But the Court she had come to in the alien South was that of the Stewards of Scotland, Westminster Abbey held the Stone of Scone, London might be exile, but we were all exiles together!

And I loved it, from the grey and primrose dawns over the serious flat river (I, whose early morning eyes had seen blue and violet sunrises over tumbling brown waters), to brilliant nights when a myriad candles looked down on our gayest revels, and even Monmouth and I would have had our fill of dancing had that ever been possible.

Then, when the world lay in its noontide bed, I would be up and away in the saddle for a gallop in the least known regions of Hyde Park, and come back to puzzle rouged ladies making their first ap-

pearance at two o'clock dinner with a bright colour that owed nothing to ceruse.

At first this could not be done. Far as I made my salary go, it did not compass the keep of a mount in town. Hirelings I could not bear the idea of, I had no man, no stable—I put the thought of riding from me with a sigh. Monmouth was Master of the Horse and would have lent me a dozen had he thought of it, but he did not think of it until some one else did! It was left to his friend Mr. Wharton, in the early days of our acquaintance, to divine my unexpressed longings; and so one fine summer's day his Grace, reviewing his cavalry in the Park, was considerably taken aback to find me, not in Frances's or the Careys' coach, but mounted on a beautiful bay filly, and soberly if smartly dished out in a rifle-green habit, accompanied by the redoubtable Tom on a magnificent chestnut hunter. I shot one glance at his surprised face, as, his Guards dismissed, he rode towards the crowd of his friends watching the gay scene, and his eye lit on Mr. Wharton and me a little apart under a tree. The tail-end of my glance travelled beneath my lashes to Tom's handsome fair face, at that moment one broad smile as his eye caught mine. "Oho!" said he under his breath!

Monmouth greeted his friends right and left, paid his court here and there, exchanged the usual banter of the day, and then cut all shorter than was his wont and came to join us.

"My cousin—*you* ride? Why was I never told so?"

I let my gaze fall. "My dear lord," I said mischievously, "you never asked, did you?"

"And Tom did?" (Brown eyes met blue eyes.)

"Why, no," said Wharton. "I offered to teach Madame to ride that I might have the pleasure of

mounting her, and sometimes, when she relents a little, of being allowed to act as her escort. My tuition was not needed, as you see, but she tolerates my presence at times."

Now Monmouth had his hands full, then if ever!—half a dozen fair ladies had the right (or the wrong) to call upon his stables and they desired it—yet it vexed him, transparently, that he had not thought of offering me a horse. For as I say, as I said ever, and ever shall say, my kinsmen the King and the King's son were generous to me in a manner I still recall with surprise; it came from kindness of heart; also it was because of their knowledge that I never asked for anything, never so much as threw out a hint—I had made that hard-and-fast rule for the regulation of my conduct at Whitehall even before I came to live there. Had I lifted a finger, the stables of The Mewes had been at my disposal long before—I know them well, far better than the inside of that fine house!—often had I gone over them with James, admiring, advising, discussing. He had frequently taken my opinion of a horse and my counsel as to its treatment, yet it amused me to realise that he had set me down in his mind as middle-aged, fit only for drives and walks, while Tom, as my self-constituted gallant, treated me as his contemporary.

It *was* diverting. I could dance with James and his young men all night long after a hard day afoot, yet I must play the dowager in a chariot or chair if I went otherwise abroad. I smiled to myself as I smoothed the glossy neck of my little thoroughbred with my gold-handled whip—which was a gift from my son—Monmouth's eye followed the whip and his eyebrows went into his hair!

We had already had our gallop, my squire and I. The sun was climbing the upper heavens, the July day was warm and sweet with lime-flowers and mur-

murous with bees, the merry world was dispersing to change its more workmanlike riding-dress for the magnificence of dinner attire. Tom Wharton (who, clever enough to see that, at this hour at all events, compliments sounded sickly and stale, had beguiled my leisure with sporting talk of a sort I seldom heard unless I listened to the Duke of York's hunting stories) saluted Monmouth as he rode up, then, with the easiest tact, drew alongside my palfrey, slipped an ungloved hand beneath mine, bared a fair head and bowed it low to kiss my fingers—a blue flash, as his smiling eyes sought mine when he lifted them, revealed eyebrows likewise raised! "A demain, Madame," and he rode away.

The imp of mischief in me prompted a glance at James of less auntly character than was my wont. Middle-aged I might be, but somehow my friends seemed always to consist of the properest men in society.

I smiled at his somewhat glum face and his brow cleared.

"And how long have these rides been in progress?" he asked.

"Since the spring," I said. "I am usually earlier afield, but not with Mr. Wharton always. Sometimes Lord Bruce hath pity on me, once or twice Mr. Thynne, and a single time Lord Arran, but that was a mistake."

Monmouth burst into a roar. "On your part?" he asked.

"Why no, on his," I said. "I went to tell him Mrs. Crofts could not come; and having encountered me while expecting her, he rode with me for half an hour before he could think of an excuse to quit me." Monmouth shook in silence!

"Cousin Charlotte, I believe you find it hard ever to go to bed."

"Cousin James, I believe you find it hard ever to get out of it! I'm from the North, you forget. I must have the air."

"And you find, Madame, that you do not care to take it in solitude?"

"Oh no, sir, 'tis these kind gentlemen who are afraid of being alone." (More mischief.)

Then I looked straight at him in the bravery of his Life Guards uniform. "Jamesy," I said whimsically, "sure 'twould be most unsuitable if the only men about the Court who could put up with my company were your father and you!"

He could not help smiling. "Well, now I'm here we'll sit awhile, my dear lady. You're in no haste? No, nor I." He called his groom, waiting a little apart, swung himself gracefully from his splendid black charger, and the man led it a few yards away. He came to me and took me down with a practised hand. "You're light," he commented. "No wonder even I cannot tire you in dancing."

"Oh aye," I said carelessly, "I've the bones of the fowls of the air—the sparrows on the housetop, I think. I leave Birds of Paradise to the Duchess of Cleveland. Let us sit, James. 'Tis sweet here, and a mighty convenient fallen tree."

"A favourite seat of yours, then?"—the Duke chopped an unoffending worm in two with his fine sword, and again eyed my golden whip. "'C. from T.'" he remarked, looking at the engraving on the handle. "'C. from I,'" I corrected.

"'Tom' isn't spelt with an I?" he asserted with the shadow of a question in his voice.

I quivered with inward merriment. "No, nor is 'Ian' spelt with a T."

"Oh!" said Monmouth.

There was a pause; then he looked up and held, like Charles, an admonishing finger at me.

"You're a *coquette!*" he cried, "and you ought to be ashamed of yourself! If you wanted that diversion, cousin, why the devil couldn't you tell me so?"

I leant back against the bole of the great lime. I was in a wicked humour and was enjoying myself.

"If you will have it, James," I said, "for the same excellent reason that I did not ride your horse! No, I'm talking folly; I would rather be—as I am—the one woman of your acquaintance with whom you are not on terms of gallantry. No, James, no, I do not play the coquette with you."

"You leave yourself free, therefore, to find amusement with other men."

"I leave myself free?" I repeated. "Of a surety. Where you are concerned, my lord Duke, I am and always shall be free."

This, I suppose, was not the wisest speech.

"But why?" cried that incorrigible 'universal terror of lovers and husbands' and by word of the Restoration Court for tactlessness. "I believe you are the only lady of the Court I haven't made love to!" (I bowed in ironical gratitude.) "And why is it, pray? Why haven't I?—I *will!*" He threw aside his gauntlets and was off the tree-trunk where he sat, down on one knee by my side, a hand on his heart, an arm round my waist, all the old tricks I had seen employed so often—the smile, the upward glance through the long lashes, the carry-you-off-your-feet method of attack. I simply put one hand behind me and withdrew his arm, leaning still farther back so that the manœuvre could not be repeated. His head, his handsome head, turned so often, should never be turned by me; the handkerchief he was wont to throw lay unheeded at my feet, and the dawning amaze in his brown eyes was, I will frankly confess,

something of a sop to my vanity, always in process of being alternately injured and gratified it would seem! To be made love to by as good looking a man as Monmouth would have quickened the pulses of a saint.

Over his dark curls my wary eye caught sight of his groom's back discreetly turned on the charming picture we made!

His servants must have been used to this sort of thing—I was amused, a trifle touched, but above all cross, though I did not show it.

"Get up, my child," I said serenely, "and behave yourself. Have you taken leave of your senses?"

"Ah, be kind to me, you drive me mad!" quoth "my child" with a heavy sigh, trying to take my other hand—that too I put behind me. "Get—up," I repeated in a quiet tone but with sufficient emphasis. He did get up, with almost laughable obedience. He threw himself back on the log beside me, pushed his hat on the back of his head, drove fine Van Dyck hands deep into his pockets and stretched beautiful long legs out in front of him. The cruel cousin, who only laughed at his adoration, the faithlessness of women, the heartlessness——!

"Oh, *boy*," I said; "this from *you?* What have you ever done yourself but be faithless and cruel and without heart, and now I am to be battered with hard words because for the first time in your life a woman is not to be won by the lifting of your little finger."

He stretched out an eager hand in protest, and I picked up the finger in question and looked at it—so did he, like a child, and then we both burst out laughing; but he was not to be headed off so easily. Back he came!

"Sweetest of Charlottes, you cannot repulse me; that isn't possible. Have you not seen how my love

for you has grown and grown until I can keep silence no longer? You break my heart in two. I swear you are the only woman——"

This was too much. "Stop," I commanded and rose abruptly. "If you think me a fool, you need not make it quite so plain. This passes a jest, sir."

"Tom Wharton——" he began, unhappily for him, for thereupon I flashed out like lightning.

"Lord!" I cried, "so that is it? For the first time you notice that your poor elderly kinswoman hath a little attention paid her for once, and thereupon you must put on these jealous airs. Fie on you! And then, since my complaisance in all directions seems assumed, because I am no older than some of your flames, because I am still active enough to dance all night and be away for a gallop betimes next morning, because I can dare to show my own complexion in the brilliant light, you think it may be worth your while to try your hand on me? But it takes two to make love! No, I'm not going to treat it as an insult; you dear idot, I should not let you insult me. And you shall not spoil our friendship, James, I love you far too well for that. Love you? Of course I love you. I couldn't have borne with you all this time if I did not!" and we both broke down, my severity and his annoyance, into childish laughter, he beginning again at once to swear he had always worshipped me, I again interrupting him. "No," I said gravely, shaking my head. "No, you always cared for me, and you and your father did me the honour to care for me from the very first; you have proved it over and over again. You have loved other women, Jamie, adored them, tired of them, forgotten them; you have not changed to me. And you are not going to change now, because Mr. Wharton is polite." (I let a little scorn creep into my voice

here.) "Has no man been civil to me before? My blind bat, it never occurred to you to notice, did it?"

It was pretty to see how he blushed, and I realised with a little stab to my heart, how beautiful poor Lucy must have been when she once used to blush for his father long, long ago—and had so much to blush for—and blushed no more.

"You make me out such a blackguard," muttered her son.

"But that is what you are," I cried cheerfully, "you *are* a blackguard! Do not be concerned about that. But remember—why, Jacques" (the old pet name of his boyhood), "remember, here am I at your beck and call for any other sport, at your bidding always, except in this one thing."

We stood together in the deserted park under the green translucent shade. The sweet scent of the lime-blossoms remains for ever in my mind in connection with the one occasion, on a golden afternoon of July, when the Duke of Monmouth offered me what he called love.

I put a hand on his arm. "My friend," I said softly, "you did me, as I told you, the honour to give me your friendship. I give mine to but few." I paused "You offer me (half in sport, James, and that hurts) something that carries no honour with it. Are you a friend of any other woman but me? Of Kitty Crofts? Why, then, so be it. I'll share your friendship with that for your *old governess!*"

He smiled absently and stood looking down at me rather hard. When James had to use his brains the effort was perceptible, if not always the result. As a matter of fact, I had pulled him up even shorter than I intended.

"Are you angry? Don't be angry, I only meant to make you happy!"

I found myself looking back at him in silence, with wonder in my eyes that nothing would keep out. (To make me happy by loving me, in jest or earnest? Why not, he wondered in turn and with him I wondered too, as a woman will marvel at the mad freaks of her own fancy. But so things were. Then he never saw, he never knew the truth? I know now that, to the very end of all things, he never knew. And That Other, did he see, he who saw everything?)

I gave myself a little shake. "Oh no," I smiled, "you only meant to amuse yourself."

He struck an impatient foot on the grass. "You're always so ready to be sure I consider nothing but my own pleasure!" he cried indignantly. Oh, that was true, but I was not going to preach further.

"Do you think first of all of what will please a woman?" I asked; but that, perhaps naturally, had no appeasing effect.

"You would be displeased, truly displeased, if I fell in love with you?" he asked, realising just too late the fatal "if" in that sentence, and we both gave way to irresistible merriment. I hit him lightly on the arm with my whip and turned towards the groom and our horses.

"I'll do you this justice," I remarked; "'tis half-past two. You've forgotten your dinner to make love to me! I'll remember that; 'tis a feather in my cap, a whole group of them—the Prince of Wales's feathers."

"If I were Prince of Wales," he said slowly, his face darkening, "would you have said 'no' to me this morning?"

"If you were King of England I should have said 'no,'" I answered in a tone devoid of every atom of

expression. "Come, I'm hungry if you are not. Call your man. Mr. Wharton will think I've run away with his mare or she with me. She's a pretty thing, is not she? He hath a fine stable."

James caught at my hand.

"Promise me this," he cried, eternally boy. "Swear you'll never ride one of Tom's horses again! The whole of my stable is for you to choose from; nay, you shall have a mount of your own. To show you've forgiven me, you'll accept it? If you will not take my heart, cousin Charlotte, you shall take my horse!"

We rode home gaily through the hot July afternoon to the palace by the river, not hastening, in spite of the lateness, our reins loose, smiling and chattering like children, as lightly and as carelessly as if we had never gone through that strange little scene in Hyde Park. But therein lay our Stuart gift of putting behind us what was over—the past was the buried past (and a shrug of the shoulders)! So is forgetfulness a virtue or a vice as you happen to use it. We parted at my little door, and I watched Monmouth ride away to the Cockpit where several bidden friends, as I afterwards heard, were starving! and, as usual, I dallied to see him go, sitting well down on his horse, moving easily as a whalebone rod with every movement, the Stuart seat. When Nature made him she spent herself on his outer man, I know, and forgot till too late what should have been within. Very near my heart lay his beauty, aye, very near my heart he was altogether, but his image paused on the threshold of the room whereinto no one entered save I myself alone, where was enshrined for ever the image of another man.

"Why *can't* I love you?" I said to myself. "Love you lightly and play the game of life as you and all

these men and women around me play it, as they would vow I play it in secret. Take what I can get with both hands, snatch at the flying skirts of my youth and renew it in yours, and taste at least a summer's delight. No one asks fidelity of me elsewhere!" and I thought of King Charles's remark: "We've all our old age before us." So we had—and old age was cold and slow.

I reached my room and threw whip and gloves on the bed. Then, suddenly tired, I turned to my mirror and let the keen light that beat up off the water show my face mercilessly revealed in the glass.

"So that was your last chance," I said, with a note of contempt. "Your Indian summer, as you once suggested to Arran. Monmouth will never woo you again. You could have held him—a week. But he would have despised you for an old fool ever after, whereas he will respect you for a sensible woman and return at once to his ancient estimate of you as—his father's contemporary (or he'll leave you to Tom)! His father respects you too. Respect from those two men. How many women have it? And Charles? He'd have laughed, oh, laughed at it for a good joke, and would never have trusted you again. And he comes first—always the King comes first."

So it is the King comes first—one learns, somehow one learns!

"But if you had been King of England I should have said 'no.' "

THE KING MY FRIEND

CHAPTER XIII

THE KING MY FRIEND

"What failings soever I may have, nothing can ever change in the least degree that friendship and kindness I have for you."—CHARLES II.

I SUPPOSE I had better confess that of all the foolish pranks I played at Court, my affair with Mr. Wharton was the maddest. I have to beg your indulgence, for he was an out-and-out rake, and when the time came, and he failed Monmouth and chose the safe side, I was truly thankful that our friendship was over. For Wharton did make love to me, with far more determination than any of the others; and though I look back to it now with a sense of disgust, almost of shame, I realise that he made a deep impression upon me, that the secret attack on my affections was somewhat enjoyed by the besieged, and, I now frankly admit, was the nearest approach to danger of that sort which I ever encountered. He was a man of boundless popularity, adored by his people and his tenants, the fast son of a narrow, gloomy upbringing, witty, very handsome in an essentially jolly, cheery, English way. And he sang King James II out of his three kingdoms with "Lillibullero!" I think over that with mixed feelings. That came late, I am glad to remember, and in after years we never met again. But since I am so frank about others, I will not spare myself. Of all the bad men of the day he was supposed to be the worst. He was an unswerving Whig; he was through and through

a sporting English gentleman and a perfect swordsman; he was dubbed "Honest Tom," yet a Tory opinion of him stated that "he was the most universal villain that ever I knew."

I do not want to set myself up as one who was lenient enough to overlook all the evil in her friends of those days, and who, therefore, can excuse herself of any sins she committed. I should never have written so much about morals as I have done in this book, were not the times so different now, but—but—but they *wrote* (whatever they *did*) just as strenuously against sin, and sinners, then! Yet the times are different, and life has changed, and a woman's position is not what it was—nor could it ever again be what mine was then, I think, bearing in mind the sort of Court which was Charles II's.

But there, too, I made mistakes, and had to learn how to guard my way. I recall a supper at James's lodgings in the Cockpit to which I was bidden, and to which I rather foolishly went.

Naturally, as Mr. Wharton was an arrant Whig, I saw more of him outside Whitehall than in it—he of course was there, and several other of Monmouth's friends; among the women the still lovely Jane Middleton, Eleanor Needham's sister, Eleanor herself, Mrs. Crofts, but no Duchess. I cursed my folly on my arrival when I found she was absent, and had never intended to be present; I ought to have guessed as much and that this was one of Monmouth's own entertainments. It had not occurred to me that his wife was not the author of the invitation, a verbal one, and I had been careful so far never openly to associate myself in public with those friends of his unrecognised by his wife, apart from the crowd at Court, where, as Charles once cynically remarked, it was "no man's land or every woman's," and all feuds private and public were of course laid aside.

It was at the time when Mr. Wharton was being most assiduous in his attentions—let me put it like that—and, to say truth, I fancy I did not think much, I accepted the message through a page of his Grace's bidding me to an informal supper.

I put on a new gown which I will venture to say was a pretty one, though rather in keeping with my reckless humour, a dark green satin brocaded all over with great damask-red roses overlapping each other, and clasped by my garnet crévés, the coils of my hair at the back tied with a quaint knot of green and damask ribbons.

Things had been just a trifle difficult in my life at that moment. The relations between Monmouth and his father had made me more anxious than ever before; Monmouth had, perhaps, sought me out unusually often; and just then I was seeing, by accident (or design on some one's part) rather less of the King. Politically it was a dangerous time; there was an undercurrent of strain, and people were either nervous and tried to conceal it, or short-tempered and didn't! I sought to keep out of everything, and had somewhat signally failed. I was not in the background as much as I wished—and to which, not so many years later, I was to return for ever,—and altogether, as I say, life was not easy. This means, and meant with me, an increase of that underlying spirit of recklessness which in nine cases out of ten leads a man into danger, and as for a woman——!

The whole truth of the success and failure of my life at Whitehall may be summed up in—my age.

Had I been younger I must have made a definite choice and have been a Margaret Blagge, let us say, or an Eleanor Needham, possibly (for how can one tell?) a Moll Kirke. I quote these three names somewhat at random, but they serve for examples; all were moderately young, passably good-looking, not very

clever. I could mention a dozen women I could never have been. I should not have had enough beauty, wits, temper, brains, or absolute badness to step into the shoes of—— I need not name them.

On the other hand, had I been older, why, I should have been *old!* and if you will consider the history of Charles II's reign, *you will see how small a part the most important of the elder women played in it.* That is a point which has passed unnoticed by historians.

This particular night I felt young (it goes with recklessness!), possibly I looked it. I made a careful and rather pronounced toilette, was exceedingly particular as to the newest shoes and gloves, perfume—which I seldom used as a rule—and patches, possibly I "made my face" rather more than was my wont; be it as it may, I arrived at "His Grace my Lord General's lodgings at the Cockpit" somewhat late, and found myself in distinctly Whiggish company, still more reckless in humour, and—may I say it?—there were two or three people present whom neither Monmouth nor I troubled ourselves about as a rule, and who were perhaps as much out of water as I confess it was my first impulse to feel.

James greeted me with his usual charm of manner a fraction exaggerated. His face was a little flushed, his dress a shade too splendid (perhaps like mine), daffodil velvet and white satin; he was obviously determined to show us we were all to enjoy ourselves and be happy. There was a great lavishness of flowers and fruit, glorious gold plate and crystal, and a good deal of wine appeared to be circulating. I took his greeting as it was given; then I confess I asked rather pointedly, "And, my dear cousin, her Grace your wife?"

Somebody laughed.

I admit that angered me, and it certainly annoyed Monmouth: it put the whole situation on the wrong

plane. I would not say for certain that he was not a trifle vexed with me for asking so outspokenly for a hostess who obviously never meant to be there, but this had not been even hinted at in the verbal message (I was wrong to take it) which I had received, as I say, by one of his gentlemen in lieu of a ceremonious invitation. After all, the Duchess of Monmouth and I were outwardly on good terms; we met fairly frequently at Court and sometimes at St. James's, as she was a great friend of the Duke of York and the Lady Mary. Monmouth made a pretty, plausible, empty excuse. I said no more; I could not, especially as there were other women there whom I met and knew at the palace entertainments, and Monmouth's friends, especially Mr. Thynne and Tom Wharton, were very well known to me. The latter proved the firebrand, as I might have guessed. I can only believe he thought I had come more or less on purpose to meet him that night; it was certain I was not dressed for the rôle of chaperon, nor was there anybody present in need of me in that rôle; I excuse Tom Wharton though I blame myself. He attached himself to me at once. He was looking extraordinarily well in his comely English way, fair-haired, blue-eyed, ruddy-cheeked. The men who liked him, and they were many, always slapped him on the back; the men who loathed him, and they were just as numerous, were very careful to be civil to his face; there was no swordsman in England, fine as most of the courtiers and all the soldiers were, to approach him—he was hardly ever challenged, for every one knew he could kill any man he pleased; he was the reverse of belligerent, for he was merciful in his power.

I was something of an enigma to him, I suppose, and a little bit of a contrast to most of his ladies; I was not too old to be attractive to a man of his age;

I imagine he was "without engagements" at that moment, and I believe he had heard it reported that nobody could succeed with me. Certainly between us we had staged a little comedy that night—which nearly strayed into the realms of tragedy.

Everybody (as everybody knows) drank deeply in those days. I am not going to say that anybody was drunk, but, from our host downwards, most of the men had had enough early in the evening! I stood a fire of somewhat too pressing compliments, with the meaningless Court smile on my face and a string of the accustomed repartees, but the pace began to be taken a little too fast.

I made up my mind, rose rather quickly, crossed the room to Monmouth and said softly, "It grows late, cousin James; I think it were well I should return. May my chair be called?"

Monmouth—a vine-wreath in his curls would have turned him into an ideal young Bacchus—just for one instant looked irritated, though his face cleared the second after. Tom Wharton, however, following hard on my heels, saw everything, and took swift advantage of that passing frown.

"Go home to *bed*, my fair lady?" he cried, and caught me by the wrist. "That you shall not, eh, 'Cousin James'? Or, if you are in such haste——" I do not know what he meant to add, something perfectly innocent in all probability; but with him, as with John Wilmot, one never could answer for the next speech.

His hand on my wrist too was going far. I turned straight round and looked at him.

"Let me go," said my look, "and hold your tongue!" but I judged it wiser to speak no word. Unfortuately he did not loose my hand, and though he did not finish his sentence, he rounded it off with a laugh which was on the verge of being familiar. But this

was not all: he stooped quickly and kissed, not the hand he held, but the shoulder next him.

I nearly laughed at what occurred then, for after all nothing really terrible had happened, and Monmouth and I had neither of us behaved quite well, and deserved what we got! But Monmouth's next move, though, as I say, it made me want to laugh, yet sent a thrill of icy fear through me, and at the same time a warm glow of gratitude—a woman likes a protector, even against the man she has tacitly allowed to pay her some sort of court.

I can remember the whi-s-s-sh with which Monmouth's sword leapt out of its scabbard—the lightning rapidity of it; my suddenly finding him, still flushed but marvellously changed and set in expression, his brown eyes deep and stern, his smiling mouth in severest lines, between me and his friend. My hand was dropped, and the glint of the steel, pretty plaything, a full-dress rapier but still a deadly weapon, separated me and Tom Wharton—in his own rooms! —his great friend, the finest swordsman in the world, a public scandal for me, and for nothing—oh, that was impossible altogether! I beat down the slender blade with my palm and said sharply, but not too quickly, "My dear James, thank you, but we're not at declared warfare yet."

I looked across at Wharton; he met me with a comprehending smile, more master of himself than was Monmouth, and evidently ready to own that he was in the wrong.

"Madame, your pardon," he said. "The thought of your loss all of a sudden must be my excuse. As for you, my dear Duke," with another charming and perfectly self-assured smile, "that's a charming toy. May it often be drawn for Madame Stuart, but not against me, the most devout of her worshippers."

Across the ring of curious eyes fixed on us three I

noticed Katherine Crofts's satirical smile, Eleanor Needham's fair face, white under her rouge with a terror I have confessed I also felt. I turned to both men. I put a hand on Monmouth's left and laid the other on Tom Wharton's. He lifted it and kissed it with perfect respect and a murmured, "Forgive me," that only *I* caught; Monmouth stood perfectly still with his point dropped as I had beaten it down. I let go his left hand and walked deliberately round him, taking hold of the hilt of the sword.

"Come," I said, like a nurse to an impatient child, "put it up," and the gleaming steel slid into the scabbard. "Thank you," I added, as if I were thanking him for sheathing his weapon, but with a certain weight of emphasis I knew he would understand.

The tension relaxed.

I broke no hearts at Court, I broke no friendships either. I can look back over those days and trust that, if I did but little good, I did not do much harm! But that evening was a lesson to more than one of us, I think. At least it taught me what to avoid. But I had not done with my pursuer then.

I might have learnt what to avoid, but not how to avoid it! That impulsive child—she was little more—Lady Sussex, installed in the rooms once her mother's, must (apparently to defy that mother) make rather a point of my acquaintance; she would send to me, run to me unattended; in fact, she put me to a considerable amount of trouble and some embarrassment, little firebrand that she was, and a perfect imp of mischief. She rushed in the next morning to consult me about a new riding-dress without asking with my leave or by my leave, impetuously a-drumming at my entrance, and, once in, impossible to dispose of. Unfortunately, when she did go, though

I had denied myself to all other company, she must needs hold me at my own door in lingering converse, laughing, screwing up her eyes in the way Monmouth did, though hers were not half so fine, pouting her full underlip, jesting to the last.

And, as she kept me there, before I could escape within, Mr. Wharton stood in the corridor, bowing, hat in hand, come to wait on me, and finding me, as his amused glance showed, fairly caught. Lady Sussex would not stay a moment then—no, not she! She "expected His Majesty"; she "must fly, fly!" and certainly she flew, and I was left, feeling as trapped as any girl whose lover has laid a gin for her, furious with myself for caring, at my age, yet knowing perfectly well that this young man was no mean antagonist, and that I should require all my aplomb and perhaps some of my courage.

I should omit this incident altogether were it not for the part the King played.

It shows me at my most foolish; it does not redound to Tom Wharton's credit—in fact, it betrays him in his worst light. It seems that, determining to keep the peace at Monmouth's lodgings the previous night, I had by no means snubbed him as I intended—in fact, he looked upon himself as encouraged. I hoped he had come in cooler blood to crave pardon; nothing was farther from his thoughts. We began with a war of words at which I trusted to hold my own, and was soon beaten; then to my dismay I found myself more closely pressed—I tried anger, and was laughed at; tried laughter in return, and was made more violent love to than ever; and to cut an ugly scene short, realising I was alone in my rooms without even my faithful maid (who was at the Duchess of Richmond's on an errand) I tore myself from the clasp of Wharton's arms, flew through the ante-room, reached the outer door and flung it open, intending, such was my

folly, simply to run into the rooms of the sempstresses —the maids-of-honour—anywhere!—instead of which I ran straight into a tall man just outside. Wharton, on my very heels, pulled up short. I, gasping for breath, found myself held upright by two strong hands, looked up wildly into a dark face, set rather sternly, but with all-comprehending eyes, and realised it was Charles himself.

Often in these later days I think over that morning's work and wonder if all those thousands who threw dirt at the name of The Merry Monarch would believe me if I said that in my most difficult moment he it was who came to my rescue.

With swift tact and understanding, he drew me within my outer door, closed it behind us, with one hand put me into a tall-backed chair in my little entry, and turned to Mr. Wharton. That confirmed Whig, important man in his own country, was little known at Whitehall, but whom did the King not know? He had the grace to bow deeply, but he never lost a tithe of his impudence; even I (even Charles, I afterwards heard) could not but admire him. "Your pardon, Your Majesty," he said easily, bowing again.

The King—never had I seen his face so darkly stern —looked him all over from head to foot from his commanding height.

"My pardon, sir?" he said slowly, "I think 'tis this lady's you should sue for."

"This lady is very kind"—the insolence of it!—"She will forgive me without asking."

I half rose and tried to speak. Charles made a little sign to me to be silent.

"I am not accustomed," he remarked in a slow, cold voice, very like the Duke of York's—one I had never heard before from him and sincerely hoped I should never hear directed to my address!—"I am

not accustomed to being corrected in my own house. You were causing this lady agitation and annoyance—beg her forgiveness."

The saturnine dark face showed very little emotion, it was almost as if a mask were set on the features; every movement was easy, the words written look sterner than they sounded, but beneath them was the note of an order given by King to subject; none but Tom Wharton could have met it lightly.

"Why, Madame," he smiled, turning to me, "since our jesting is perforce treated seriously, I crave most humbly your clemency. Yours, Sire, I must also ask, as it appears I poach upon your preserves."

Upon this absolutely impossible speech there fell for one instant a silence so profound that it was in itself terrifying. This was the man I had been fool enough to treat as a friend, a gallant, a "servant," to whom in lighter moments I had given some license —that he, knowing me (as he did) should say such a thing *of* me and *to* the King! For an instant, I frankly confess, I was completely swept off my feet. How would the King take it?—in my rooms—in his own palace? James had drawn his sword for me but last night, and now this insolence before my face and to His Majesty!——

I can only excuse myself by saying I did not think of Madame Stuart at all. I ignored the all-too-plain insinuation as to my relations with my Royal cousin; I never took into consideration how shamefully my kindness of heart, yes, even my passing recklessness, were being abused; I only thought of the King and what he would do. And what he did was to my mind wholly admirable. To treat such a statement as worthy of anger was to treat it as worthy of refuting. A laugh would have been part of Tom Wharton's own armoury; a withering rebuke, however richly deserved, might have been met with still more hopeless

insolence. Charles drew out his snuff-box, took a pinch, looked at him, lifted his eyebrows ever so lightly, and said in a perfectly natural voice: "I had thought you a clever fellow, Tom. You're a damned fool, and you know it. Now you can go." And without another word Tom Wharton went.

The door closed behind him. I rose to my feet and made a step towards the King. "Sire," I said firmly, "now I take on myself all the blame for this. I have—encouraged him. But believe me—oh! you *do* believe me, do you not?—that is all, all?" and I found myself holding his laced cuff and staring with eager gaze into his. The smouldering brown-black eyes lit up ever so little, the upper lip curved.

"Am I," said Charles, his disengaged hand laid on both of mine—"am I to call you what I called that pestilent fellow?" as I fell back, rather near breaking down and laughing at the same moment. "Encourage 'em, by gad! why not? But choose the right sort, my cousin. Shall I go away and vow you have encouraged *me?*"

"Ah, Sire," I said quickly. "Go away and say anything you like of me. You know, and I know, and what else signifies? Am I never to be done thanking you? James drew his sword for me on Mr. Wharton last night."

"James? Well, he never lacked pluck!" said Charles meditatively. "The finest swordsman in my three kingdoms. He'd have spitted James and me at one lunge and gone home to breakfast thinking no more of it, with you under his arm, shall we say?"

I was obliged to laugh. "No, we will not say it," I said. "He who hurts you, or James—well. . . ." I paused.

"Well," echoed Charles, "your favourite phrase! I should say 'ill.' But all's well that ends well. I do not think you will have more trouble. If you do, why, I am not far off. Scream, my lady, scream, and I'll come running—to be spitted willingly," and he laughed and so did I.

"Ah, but I must ask forgiveness," I said, "that you should have been so insulted—and because of me."

Charles looked at me very severely. "Madame," he replied, "no man insults me unless I permit it. I do not think yonder clown has my permission. And because of you!" his face suddenly softened. "Women are silly," he remarked, half aside. "You know in your heart you are glad it was I, eh?"

"That's different," I cried. "Oh yes, I'm glad! You —you're so strong, somehow."

"Somehow?" he mocked. "Yes, I'm still fairly hale; and James—you did not actually hate having his sword drawn for you? And knowing all the time, in spite of appearances, that you were a good girl?" He smiled, and then laughed outright; then he stopped suddenly. "I wonder what it feels like to be good," said Charles II, thoughtfully.

"When it brings your King and your King's son into a mad business like this," I said stoutly, "it feels horrible!"

Charles turned to the door with the kindest of farewell glances from those deep eyes. "Ah," he said, "but you weren't being quite good; you were almost being naughty, my cousin! Now I must find that little witch Anne. They told me she was here, that was why I came on from her lodgings to yours."

"She was, Sire, but she ran away ever so mischievously when Mr. Wharton came."

"Good-bye, cousin Charlotte," answered my

Sovereign as I let him out. "And now, for pity's sake, revise the company you keep. Anne, Tom, myself, all in an hour! At any rate you don't want for excitement. Now try to get hold of somebody quiet and decent and dull!" and he was gone with that swift swing of his down the corridor. I locked the door, and the door of my saloon.

"Oh, Charles," I said to myself, "and they speak ill of you! They say you're bad. How bad, how very much worse they must be themselves to draw evil out of you, since I (who deserve shaking and have been soundly shaken this morning) get this!"

And the next time I met Mr. Wharton was under the green shade of the Mall, as I was walking with the Careys and John Evelyn, and all he got in return for his usual bow and smile, and his graceful insolence in addressing me as if nothing had happened, was a little yawn, half hidden by a great shading fan, and the back of my scornful head.

WILLIAM THE CONQUEROR

CHAPTER XIV

WILLIAM THE CONQUEROR

"Sentries, pass him through,—
Drawbridge let fall—he's the lord of us all,
The dreamer whose dream came true!"

RUDYARD KIPLING.

I KNEW William III moderately well when Prince of Orange, and I heard him discussed tremendously before, and during, his reign as King of England.

I have read a great deal about him in this later life, for and against, and I had, and have, a precisely similar opinion of him. I do not believe his religion counted for much, nor his love for his wife or for anybody else, not excepting the men favourites to whom he was certainly deeply attached. I do not think his direct patriotism, if I may put it thus, his love for Holland, was as great as many thought. But he was above all things a man of boundless ambition—a great flame of fire burning in a frail body—and the whole of that ambition, the One Idea of his life, was the breaking of the power of France over the civilised world. People frequently forget that France was very nearly as much the bogy of Europe then as Germany (and Germany quiescent, too!) has been, to those who knew, this last decade. William meant to break France, and he broke her—he has my respectful homage. I can see how deeply hero-worship for him must sink in the hearts of those who love him. I pay him the supremest compliment possible from a woman—I wish the men I loved had been as strong

and single-minded. I would gladly have thrown in my lot with Nassau had there been no Charles and no Monmouth. As it was, I had nothing to give him—perhaps, since we were all working underground in the latter part of my life at Court, he and I were opposed. Outwardly he was polite to me, certainly he did me the honour of noticing my existence, and therefore I fancy he thought me a source of possible danger. I would have gone back to Court when James II abdicated, and put my poor services, such as they were, at the disposal of William and his wife. But to this day I am not sure that part of the scheming that encompassed Monmouth's downfall was not due to William, marvellously well concealed; but if William could hide all from me, Bentinck did not, Ailesbury had a shrewd guess.[1] Charles knew; what Monmouth knew died with him; James II knew nothing. The horror and the tragedy, and yet the comedy of it all! We were pieces in his game, or in the game against him. He fought France single-handed, single-hearted, though he had other affairs on hand and at heart, and some of us were in the pay of France (never I!) so I think that occasionally we got in his way. Well, he swept us out of it.

So I used to sit in my farmhouse in Hertfordshire and listen to the echoes of the Court—plenty of echoes rang in St. Albans, from Churchill sources, I vow!—and I saw France tottering to her fall, and I saw William killing himself over the darkening of that great reign—the Day of the Sun. I speak of a reign, not of a country. Thus it was. Louis XIV was a perfectly stupendous figure—little, vain, sour-faced, high-heeled, wicked Louis, yet a gentleman every inch

[1] Vide the *Memoirs of Thomas Bruce, Earl of Ailesbury,* Roxburghe Club, Camden Society. As gentleman of the Bedchamber, Bruce was intimately associated with Charles, James of York, and James of Monmouth, from 1674 to the downfall of James II in 1688.

of him to the exiled Stuarts, and a man who, alas! was fated to watch himself descend into the darkness from the zenith of his great kingship. I am sorry for Louis XIV, I have no sorrow for William III, for all we are called on to pity him for his bad health and the loss of that dear lady, his wife, his existence of struggling against titanic difficulties, and his courage in the face of innumerable defeats.

His dream came true; and I have no pity!

In 1677 he came over to England to marry the Lady Mary.

There were gay doings, overlying a sense of unrest, and a very markedly felt opposition to the marriage, helpless, but furious, on the part of the Duke of York. Why was Charles so set on it? It would seem as if he had second-sight, that he knew the children to be born to the youthful second Duchess would never sit on his throne, that James his brother would never sit there long, that this wedding would provide England with a couple of heirs—the nearest—married to each other, assurance made doubly sure. And I wonder and I wonder yet, if at the bottom of his schemings he did not go about to cut down the power of France by the foot through this pretty, tall, malleable niece, and this stern, self-contained nephew, in whose Stuart-brown eyes burned the fire of undying ambition—and hatred of Louis. It may be. Charles saw so far! Indeed, it may be that he saw farther than I do now, who have seen it all come to pass—William's foot on France's neck, and the Lady Mary, ere she went to her early grave in The Abbey, the adoring wife who helped set it there, and one of the best queens England has ever had.

I did not see much of the gaieties for several days. The Princess alternated between fits of almost

hysterical high spirits and floods of tears. Her sister Anne was unwell, so was their gouvernante, Lady Frances Villiers (the smallpox declared itself in both cases shortly after), Mary of Modena was daily expecting her child, the Duke of York was unapproachable—or, at any rate, best not approached!—anxious politicians, Danby especially, in the foreground of whose mind the Tower ever loomed, added to the tension of the atmosphere. M. Barrillon, the French ambassador, was obviously annoyed, and as obviously at a loss to fathom Charles's tactics; that monarch was jovial, full of spirits, and a magnificent host. To see him dealing with his nephew William M. Bentinck, and the other Dutchmen who came in the Prince of Orange's train, was as good as a play!

The trouble was that William was hard to entertain. The King could not, and would not, always be at it; he hardly seemed aware of the Lady Mary's presence, several of the professionally amusing women (I will be so far spiteful) tried their best, and failed as amusingly—he looked over their heads, short though he was, with his great melancholy eyes, and as he could parry words with the best of us, when they tried sarcasm they were beaten in open Court! Nothing escaped those eyes. William attracted me in one way and repelled me in another, but a man with a single great idea always compels admiration, generally unwillingly. He could dance, he dressed not ill, he was half a Stuart for all he seemed to wish to ignore it—myself, I thought the Lady Mary a fool, for none could deny that he was a man, and would go far; besides, there is a subtle fascination in a gentleman to whom beauty and youth and easy wit are nothing, and brains count—that I saw soon. I fancy I was one of the first people who noticed the way in which Elizabeth Villiers was drawn to him, and he to her, by the sheer magnetism of their

cleverness—he was ambitious, and she ambitious for him.

There was music one night, and I was bidden—I had excused myself when they danced; the whole business was fraught with too much strain for me, the air was volcanic. I could sit in a quiet corner and listen to some of my beloved melodies, I thought. I put on a simple dark blue silk gown, wore no jewels, omitted ceruse, slipped unostentatiously into the background, and, behind a great black and gold fan, listened to the enchanting strains. Music *was* music at Whitehall.

And then the unexpected happened.

Monmouth had been looking rather glum all the evening. He was fond of his youthful cousin Mary, who danced adorably with him, and though he enjoyed the routing of his uncle James, he was puzzled by the King's attitude and bothered—Monmouth was always bothered by the underlying politics that seethed below! He, whom I had not seen to speak to that night, threaded his way through the shifting crowd and the array of gilded seats; I looked up gladly, hoping he was coming to talk to me, but saw directly that he was not alone, a small dark man in a claret satin suit and heavy auburn peruke was on his heels.

"Madame, the Prince of Orange wishes me to present you to him," and William and I were face to face.

I rose immediately, curtsied, smiled, made some banal remark about the music, or the crowd, or what not, and met his gaze with the piercing brown eyes looking steadily at me.

"So it is not play you want, sir," I said to myself, "that is a business-like expression if ever I saw one!" I think *my* expression must have betrayed my thoughts, for a gleam of understanding shot through the fixed stare.

"Ah, Highness," I said, but lightly. "Why do we—do I—make vain talk? Forgive me, I have fallen into the trick of it."

"One falls into many tricks here, it seemeth," he said. His English was slow and laboured; now and then his accent was marked, a fact which militated against him at our polyglot Whitehall, where we chattered French or English with equal ease, had a smattering of many other tongues—Dutch, Portuguese, and Italian especially.

"Oh," said I, "we do not always say exactly what we mean—do *you*, Highness?" This rather bold sally did not offend, but seemed to amuse him.

"Hardly," he replied; "but Madame, forgive me, I think many of this fine company"—he glanced round it—"could not say what they meant if they tried, for they mean nothing. Those who mean something, certainly aim at concealing their meaning."

I looked round with an air of following his glance, piqued, for I did not think his speech polite, but interested to see what else he would say.

"A sorry collection of rattlepates, sir," I volunteered, with a wise, middle-aged smile. "And everybody does think he has a most important game to play, and plays it, like an ostrich, with only his head hidden. There is much to watch at Court."

"There is little to trust," said William of Orange bitterly, with disarming, but, I think, calculated frankness. "Tell me, Madame, have you such a thing as an honest man or an honest woman in Whitehall?"

For an instant I was furious. Then I checked my upward-surging temper. There was meaning in that query.

"Eh?" I said with a rising inflexion. "That is the remark—forgive me, Highness—of some one who has had a trial of wits and has been——" I paused.

"No, I am wrong! I will answer your question. Yes, sir, there is one honest man."

I pointed with my fan to a big mirror beside us. I was amused to see the flicker of a smile across the young Prince's face as he, following the fan, met his own reflection. I smiled too, but I added: "Highness, believe me, you would think us all honest if we agreed with you. Am I wrong as well as impertinent?"

He looked me over slowly. "You have caught the trick—the eternal trick—of juggling with words," he replied coldly. "What you meant to say was that I consider myself honest, and because my methods and *intentions*" (there was an underlining of the last word I could not miss) "are totally different from yours, I am certain you are all false."

A little silence fell between us. "Why, sir," I ejaculated softly, with irrepressible amusement, "then I must indeed have been rude! Yet it is the truth; do you not think so? And if that is the case, mon prince, we are being terribly"—I hesitated on purpose—"*honest* with each other, you and I, are not we? At least these are no pretty Whitehall speeches! But who said I was in love with pretty speeches? I never was. I will answer you (I think I have done it already) quite straight. Ask me what you like, Highness, for I do not count for anything here; and"—I turned a little about, shifting my dark skirts and closing my fan—"and I am not at all afraid of you!"

Here he laughed.

The whole stern serious face lit up in true Stuart mirth, the worn lines that pain had drawn vanished, the wonderful eyes twinkled as merrily as his uncle's. He bowed slightly. "No, Madame, I saw that at once. Now I will also ask you one thing: Why is my prespective bride so much afraid of me?"

I looked at him, and then, for the life of me I could not help it, I let my eyelids droop and said softly: "Oh, sir—why—if I were a child of fifteen and ordered to marry you offhand, I might be a little scared!"

He was not angry; he smiled again. "I see," he said. "Natural feminine nervousness; I know so little of women."

At that, as I had promised him, I spoke straight. "Oh," I said, "Oh, but how lucky for her! She is a charming girl, win her heart and you will win—all that goes with it; and that," I added, and looked him between the eyes, "may be much, Highness."

The music rose and fell, the crowd moved, dissolved, formed in groups, glanced at us or passed us by.

"Sir," I said, "I wish with all my heart Princess Mary had married her cousin Monmouth. The dates were out, and——" I shrugged my shoulders.

The Prince glanced at me, his upper lip slowly curving into the line I knew so well. "You would have preferred a bastard for the Lady Mary to the reigning Prince of Orange," he remarked very slowly and extremely coldly. "Perhaps I can do better for her than that."

Whatever happened I was not going to get angry, but neither was I to be silenced.

"Frankly," I said, moving the great fan to and fro in time to the beat of the distant music, "I was not thinking of you. It was of Monmouth, and what marriage with a girl like her Highness might have done for him."

The Prince of Orange regarded me. "As you remarked before, 'that might be much.' "

"I love James," I confessed, "and I should have dearly liked a wife he could love. I am not ambitious for him."

"But he is ambitious," said William quietly. "So am I. So is my good uncle of York. So are most of these fine gentlemen and ladies. They all want something, and they are all ready to pay a price for it and—to be paid a price. Now," he turned right round and considered me, "*you* have a price; what is it?"

I stood before him, still slowly fanning myself, and I laughed. "First of all, sir, am I ambitious? If so, what do I want? And the figure of my price would come after that. But perhaps there is yet another thing to be said. Do you think so certainly that I am for sale? and if so, do you think anybody—yes, Highness, anybody—could buy me? And," I finished quite lightly, "do you think that, once this problematical sum were paid, I should be worth it?"

"I am not going to make a bid," he said serenely—his diplomatic methods were marvellously outspoken.

"No, sir," I smiled, "I hope not. If I might dare to think of your Highness's freely given friendship in future, it would be a happiness. Whereas, if you offered me" (I looked once more round the glittering room) "all you can think of to tempt a woman and I said 'No' . . ." We laughed. Then I was swiftly serious and spoke in a low tone.

"Recollect, sir, not all women are for sale. Think of that when you wed our sweet Princess. Some women give, if they can but find the man who can make them wish to give, all—all. Think no more of me or the logic we have chopped to-night. But you are to marry a wife with whom you may work marvels. Make her love you first."

He glanced once more at me, curiously, and gave a little sigh; I could see all that went on in his mind. He had every belief in his powers as a great prince—as a lover he knew nothing of himself.

"Do you doubt?" I asked. "Oh, if you but try, Nassau"—I dared this form of address—"I do think a woman would be hard put to it to refuse what you might ask! Think. Indeed I may have done you good service."

Perhaps I did. I meant to. Why not? But if I could have married Mary to Monmouth that week I should never have thought of Holland and its Stadtholder again. And the world might have gone so differently for us all!

Oh, William of Orange who was never my friend, you set your ironshod heel on more necks than that of the great Louis. Mary your wife was your slave, her father James fled outcast before you into exile, his son, the rightful heir, was never more than heir, Monmouth—there I say nothing. And you yourself died when but a comparatively young man, even before my Lord Churchill your contemporary rose to the greatest heights of his starry career. Shakespeare charged us to "fling away ambition, by that sin fell the angels." Why, if it be a sin, then those who suffer from it cease to be angels; undoubtedly some of them fall. But I have seen more flights towards the upper air than descents from Heaven; and if you were Lucifer you did not fall, you attained your object.

Was it worth it, William of Nassau, Prince of Orange, and later King of England? You succeeded, and we hated you—and the hate of England is a terrible thing.

THE LOVE OF LADY WENTWORTH

CHAPTER XV

THE LOVE OF LADY WENTWORTH

This is the last request
Of those who heard the voices in the night,
Of those who saw the vision on the height,
Only to watch it fading from their sight:
"Grant us no second best!"

ISABEL BUTCHART.

IT was not very long after this that I, watching Monmouth rather more closely than before, came to see a change in him, almost imperceptible at first. He was restless—nothing new, that! but it was a differing restlessness—distrait, serious in a manner that provoked his father's badinage, and (as I noticed also) arrested Charles's attention. He too kept a wary black eye on Monmouth. What ailed our bad boy?—in truth a boy no longer, yet everlastingly a child to Charles and me.

Watching, I saw that yet another watched—ah, there lay the key to the riddle! All was made clear to me in a lightning flash by the slight change in Henrietta Wentworth's bearing. She was on the alert—and also obviously on the defensive; there was no meeting of James's overtures half way, indeed she retreated as he advanced, and, as time went on, sought more and more to avoid him,—she was cool, she was calm, she was entirely baffling.

Of course this piqued Monmouth, and of course he attacked with redoubled ardour, only to be decisively and very skilfully repulsed; never had he been so utterly taken aback, he seemed to expect the

heavens to fall! I remember one day passing through the many small rooms that ran one into another in the palace, and finding them both by the window, Monmouth, repulsed again, swinging off with a bow to her, a puzzled smile at me, more hurt than he meant to show. She, facing me, was white, breathless, her hands clenched, as furious with me as with him!—standing by the casement, motionless.

I went closer to her and stood before her. "My child," I said, "you are angry with me as well as with the Duke. You fancy I want him just to get his own way, as usual. But what does he want this time, and what has he to give? What could you be to him, what *would* you?"

"Not a Moll Kirke," she fired up (a cold fire); "not a Betty Felton; not a——"

I stopped her with a smile. "I know the list of those whom you could never be—you are not of that sort, those light fools. I know you so much better than you think; I am not afraid for you, I am afraid for him. For the first time in his life he has met Love face to face. He brings you a heart as untouched as if he had never looked at another woman! and, Lady Wentworth, at whom hath he not looked? But he is yours to make into a man. The Stuarts would all have been different if they had loved, and had had love from, the right person. I believe now that one has chosen the right."

She made a movement as if to speak, and I put my hand on her arm. "Listen to me patiently for a moment," I said. "I talk of this matter for the first time—and perhaps the last—but for the first time in five long years, Lady Wentworth."

She drew herself up, straight and clim and tense, to her full height, and the glimmering eyes like black diamonds looked down into mine, and right to my very soul.

"I have known from the first, and you have known that I know," I said briefly. "I alone, Mistress. I have no more to say to you, I am not thinking of you at all, I am thinking of him—of him—of him; yet I am not in love with him, remember!—and you are."

Her whole face changed, softened, was irradiated by one of the most beautiful smiles I have ever seen. *At last* I had struck the right note with her!—my carelessness of herself, my selfless devotion to Monmouth.

"*I* have thought of him, and of no one else at all, ever since I first met him," she said simply, "seven years ago, and you have known me for five years, and for five years you have known this . . . and oh!" her voice broke in a little ripple of intense amusement—"he—he hath not guessed it yet! Let me laugh just for once, Madame!" and we looked at each other and were serious no longer. ("Just for once, Madame,"—that phrase made my heart ache beneath our merriment.)

"Oh," she murmured again, and "oh, how can a beloved man be so blind?"

"You have blinded him," I smiled at her. "You do not know there is a rapier in your eyes, my dear!"

"Perhaps there is," she answered in a whisper, her laughter put away as suddenly as it had begun. "Perhaps there is! I have fought for him so long; I have been fighting all the world for him."

"Sheathe your sword," I said, "you are turning it on him too. I saw—just now—and you frightened *me!* He is at your feet, and you bewilder him, puzzle him, make him doubt himself, doubt you. For once do not be angry, smile, just for once, and see how he looks at you. There is only one way of looking for every man in the world when it is at the woman he worships."

She turned her fair face to me. "Oh, I know—I know!" she said with another little broken laugh, "I know how he looks at me! But you, Madame, you who leave love out of your life, you too feel . . . ?" The words came draggingly as if she did not mean to say them.

"I also," I returned in my usual voice. "Even I—just a little."

"Little, Madame?" asked Henrietta Wentworth. "Too much!"

She turned her eyes from me as if she did not want to watch my face, and bent them on the Thames run-low and sluggish between his mud banks. And as her gaze was on the water, mine was on her, and there we stood in complete silence. I drew a deep breath. "James," I said, half to myself, "you're fortunate. By Heaven, you are!"

"'*Fortunate?*'"—her amazed voice brought back my laughter as she glanced round again at me.

"Lady Wentworth," I said, "I never had a daughter. Yet I wish I had,—*you*. More, I wish the Fates willed otherwise, and that you were to be my son's wife."

"No woman can say more than that," she answered; then swiftly she caught up one of my hands and pressed it to her lips. From that moment we were strangers no longer.

"And this is Whitehall," I said (irrelevantly, it seemed, but she understood me at once). "Ah, but there is love here, and those who know as much about it as you and I, my child."

"There is one," she whispered softly, "the Queen—ah, Madame Stuart, the poor little Queen! She waits . . . as I do. I am not as Her Majesty, but—but I will love *him* as she loves the King." And at that the door opened and the King himself came through, alone.

He looked at us, standing there, then he walked across to us and put a hand on Henrietta's shoulder as she rose from her curtsey. "Will you?" said he, with a whimsical side look at me. "You will love him—*him?*"—he twinkled at me again—"as somebody loves me? I' faith, I wouldn't if I were you! Nobody loves me, my lady. Not"—he paused—"not the kind of love I want. They all love me in their own way, and *it isn't mine.*" He glanced at me with amusement. "You love me, my dear?" and he put a hand on my shoulder too, and I stooped my face and kissed it, laughing easily.

"To the death, Your Majesty." He laughed too, and then gave a little sigh. "Yes, 'to the death, Your Majesty!'" "To the death, cousin Charles," I said boldly, and he smiled and sighed again.

"My dear," he said, "my loyal and devoted *cousin!* But," to Henrietta, "you don't want to love this nameless gentleman"—he gave us both a little shake by the shoulders he held—"as a loyal and devoted cousin?"

"No, Your Majesty, as a loyal and devoted lover," she said firmly (to my great surprise), and looked him straight in the face. They never knew fear, those Wentworths.

"Then do so," said the King suddenly, "and, if he is unworthy, I'll kill him for you. Now you'd better tell me who he is, or I shan't be able to do it."

"I'll tell you, Sire," was the answer, "when he is unworthy; but you shall kill me then—it will be my fault."

He looked at me and said, with that grave face of his belied by the upward tilt of his lips, "Oddsfish, then don't let it be your fault, for I shall break my word rather than break that pretty neck," and he took hold of the nape of her neck for one second with his long brown fingers. Her eyes suddenly fired again.

She neatly and swiftly made another curtsey and left his hand in the air, backed, and was gone. He looked at me.

"Mustn't touch her, eh?" he asked, with that quaint foreign gesture of his hands. "I ought to have known! But she'll be just the girl for him, and she'll hold him, as none of us ever could."

"So you know, Sire?"

"Know!" said he. "Since when was I the biggest fool in Whitehall?—as big a fool as James himself. Heigho! I'm sorry for Anna, and yet she's too clever to hold any man."

I exclaimed at this.

"Certainly, Madame, a woman may be clever, must be clever, to do it, but she must also be somewhat of a fool. This child will be both."

"And James?" I asked.

"We all love him, and we're fools about him."

"Not altogether, Sire, in all other ways," I suggested.

"No, but fools entirely where James is concerned; as silly as he is, with all his pretty ways. I am afraid for James" (my own phrase!) "Perhaps—*now*——" but it was with a little shrug he turned and went on his way, for he knew James had never loved him as he loved James. And I loved him with all my heart, and he valued it, as a friend's, a kinswoman's love.

"If I had been your mistress," I said to myself as I went away too to my little room. "*If!* Well, you would have had a loyal and devoted lover who thought of you first, and last, and of herself never, and maybe you would have been surprised! But it is impossible to think of such love between you and me, or between me and your son. Yet he's nearly

as fond of me as his father is. But that's not love."

"Isn't it?" said a voice, and I found I was speaking aloud to myself. Monmouth was standing at the window of my withdrawing-room, waiting for me. "I want to talk to you—may I? I've been waiting here years, like a sentry!"

"*You* wait for a woman?" I cried, then laughed, "but I'm not a woman, am I, my dear boy? I'm the interfering old crone who frightens you away—and then makes love for you!"

"*You*," he exclaimed. "Sit down and tell me," and I found myself pulled down on my settee beside him (incorrigible schoolboy) by a handful of my skirts.

"Tell me—oh, you're an angel!"

"Yes, but that's not being a woman either," I said, laughing. "There isn't much to say. What do you *want* me to tell you?"

"The truth!" he cried, and gave a little shake to the silken folds he still held.

I looked at him with calculated coolness, up and down, just as he sat beside me on the couch, half fallen back against the piled cushions, half leaning coaxingly towards me, the curve of his glowing cheek within an inch of my shoulder, his eyes raised beseechingly to mine.

"Cousin Charlotte, the truth an you love me!"

I laughed once more. "That will be something new," I said, "truth from one of my sex to one of yours—to you! Are you sure, James, that you will care about it when you hear it? Well, ask me what you will—I'll answer."

"Why does not she love me?" he said.

I looked at him again, more coolly than ever. "Why should she love you?" I asked deliberately. He stared

at me as if he did not understand—as a matter of fact I do not believe he did. "'Why should she?'" he began in a puzzled voice.

"Yes!" I returned, with a touch of assumed impatience. "Why should she, after all? She probably cares for another man and doth not trouble her head about you."

For the first time in my life I penetrated a weak spot in his armour; he winced as if I had slapped his face. But I was brutal.

"My dear," I said, in my very best auntly manner, "you take too much for granted. Lady Wentworth may not even like you. In that case, circumstances being what they are"—I spoke again with deliberation—"it is just possible that she simply resents your love-making. For what have you to offer her?" and I looked into his troubled eyes very seriously. He blazed up (my heart warmed, I confess it freely, at that blaze)!

"Offer her? My love, all my love—all, all! Such love as the world has never seen before."

Oh, James, oh, James, how young, how eternally young you were! Love such as our poor cold elderly earth never knew, because you yourself had never yet known it? I gave a long sigh that merged into a little shaken laugh—and broke off short. For I had a surprise.

He let go my dress, laid his hand over mine lying in my lap, just as his all-comprehending father might have done; he looked at me with a quite new expression on his face, and suddenly I said to myself, "It is true, it is true. He loves after all—real love, that I always hoped he would feel some day," and as I said this to myself I heard the soft sweet voice murmur very gently, "My dear cousin, you sigh, you understand? *You* have loved too; perhaps you love now. You know what it means."

He was learning, then? I looked into the sympathetic face with its strangely altered expression and said as softly, "Yes, Jamie, I do know what it means. But I did not think you did."

"And now"—he smiled with a return of the old sparkling mischief—"and now you know I do! So it is not only I who am hearing the truth, eh? Yes, Madame, I know, at last I know. I love her—*ah!*" Here he suddenly released me, jumped up, strode to the fireplace, paused, came back again. As I rose too, he caught my hands once more in his and held them against the silken shirt between the open fronts of his saffron cloth coat.

"Feel," he said like a child. "There's my heart—feel!"

I looked up at him. Through the thin filmy folds, the throbbing of his strong young heart beat against my hands, hard, swift, passionate, and as it throbbed he repeated, "I love her—love her—love her. She will not hear, and you would not see. You think that because I've played the rake and run after a hundred women that I loved before? Pah! You thought that was love, cousin?"

I looked up at him still. "Wasn't it, Jamie? You would have sworn it was, each time, each fresh time. Was it never love?"

He shook his head very seriously, with again that new look in his eyes. "I'm afraid it wasn't, my dear," he said; "it was something you know nothing about."

(*I* was being taught, it seemed, and, 'faith, I was learning!)

I took my hands from his heart and laid them on his shoulders among his curls. "Listen," I said; "I am going to believe you, for 'tis you indeed, not I, who are telling the truth this afternoon, I think. I never knew you really cared, and I wanted to know.

For, my dear, I have known what she felt this many a long year."

He gazed at me in utter astonishment.

"Oh, I knew—and you do not. So now I'll tell you that *she loves you.* I think she has loved you all her life."

He was so surprised that he could find no words; he began, stammered, and stopped short again.

"Loves me?" he cried at length, and up in the brown eyes leapt a light new to them; he caught his breath, and his lips parted. "Loves me, has loved me long? Dear, you are raving, she hates me like the plague!"

I burst out laughing and gave a little shake to the shoulders on which my hands rested. "Perhaps," I hazarded, "since I, even I, know something of this game — perhaps, my child, it is the same thing!"

He was much too serious to see any fun in the matter; also a great deal too anxious for my opinion to mind my teasing him. He grasped my wrists in turn, and in turn gave them a little shake. "Dare I hope that?" he asked in a low voice, very gently, though his eyes were dark with passion. "Dare I? For by Heaven if it be true—if it be true. . . ."

"More truth, Jamie!" I answered tenderly. "It *is* true."

We did not say anything more, we stood still and looked at each other, he wondering, it seemed to me, if he could possibly believe; I, gauging the extent of his devotion, and finding myself, to my great surprise, out of my depth in those dark eyes that once had been so gaily shallow. How deep now!—I too caught my breath. What is this love that it turns us to strangers under the gaze of those who know us best?

"Oh, my dear boy," I said at length, "I did not know."

"And I," he replied, "I don't think I know anything about women, and I thought I knew—too much."

He lifted my hands from his shoulders, kissed them both, and the old sunny smile broke out afresh. "Now I leave you, my kindest friend. I go—wish me luck!" and he was at the door in a twinkling. I smiled and nodded from where I stood in the middle of the floor.

"Don't fly after her; she has gone to the Duchess this half-hour. She went off rather angry, by the way!" and I laughed again. "Your father. . . ."

"Was *he* there?"

"There to some purpose; he offered to break the neck of a gentleman unknown he overheard us talking of, if he were unworthy of her, and she said he should break hers in that case (don't stare at me, it isn't very hard to follow!), and he touched the nape of her neck and she curtsied away and fled."

"Aha!" remarked Monmouth, with a smile.

"So you understand?" I asked quickly.

"I ought to, you see *I* had made her furious. I—I'd kissed the back of her neck just before you came in."

"James, you're a perfect fool," I said.

"Perfect," he smiled, "I always was. But I'll go away and think."

"Can you, I wonder?" I inquired, as he bent over my hand, then suddenly I stooped and parted the curls of his peruke and kissed his neck in turn. He stood up and looked at me and laughed, threw his handkerchief into the air, caught it again, and was gone.

"Ah," said I to myself. "Good-bye, my dear boy. But that wasn't kissing, was it?"

That was the line I took. I did not consider the girl at all. I make no excuses for myself, for I ask for no excusing. Believing as I did that Henrietta would keep Monmouth straight and make a different man of him, I was content to wait for time to prove me right. But remember, never, never would I have lifted a finger to help him had I not felt sure that he was in love for the last time as well as the first.

So when I write myself as a "good" woman at the Restoration Court, I do so in inverted commas. According to my own modern standard my share in the business was beyond all pardon, and I was told that, after Lady Wentworth's tragic death, I ought to have spent the rest of my time overwhelmed with remorse. But I did not think her death half so tragic as my own later life, I never considered her anything but fortunate to die as she did, I envied her luck! She had the whole of his heart and she kept it to the end, with his dying breath he declared that she had redeemed him from a life of vice, he thought her a saint always, he called her his "lady of virtue and honour" on the scaffold.

But I suppose we were all sinners together in that life! and so, since some hold that we expiate our crimes in other existences, it may be that Charlotte Stuart left part of her debt still undischarged—poor Charlotte Stuart, who paid so great a price,—and that therefore, in this life of mine, I have settled the account against her.

I know now that she did wrong, but they loved Monmouth, Lady Wentworth and Madame Stuart, and their sinful love won him from a life of sin. Doubtless they did evil that good might

JAMES DUKE OF MONMOUTH.

come, asking "shall soul not somehow pay for soul?"

Nothing is worth having in this world or out of it that one does not pay for, and the more one pays, the more it is worth having. So believed Henrietta Baroness Wentworth of Nettlestead. So I believed and believe.

BOTHWELL BRIG

CHAPTER XVI

BOTHWELL BRIG

Be it for me to behold you again in dying,
Hills of Home!—and hear again the call,
Hear about the graves on the moorland the peewits flying,
—And hear no more at all.

R. L. S.

The Covenanters rose in Scotland in May 1679. Things had begun to go badly between Charles and Monmouth, and on the top of my worries came civil war in my country. Do not tell me that a Scot is not always ready to fight another Scot, clan rises against clan, feuds never die out, but I had been born in 1640, and the saints know civil war was the nightmare of my earlier life! Shaftesbury, as President of the Privy Council, presently put forward Monmouth, who was Captain-General, all was settled secretly and hurried forward. I knew my son's regiment was to go, I knew Monmouth was going in command of the forces, but I expected to see neither of them before they went. All I knew was that Frances had a French lady of Louis's Court, an old friend, staying with her at that moment, mightily full of several new dances. She proposed to teach us—Queen Catherine was much interested; enfin, between her and the Duchess I was bidden to go and learn (or help teach) with the rest.

I was in a somewhat strange frame of mind; over me hung a cloud that, for all my arguments and self-persuasion, I could not banish. I did not want to be

plagued with this French madame, I did not even want to dance, but I was commanded, and so, with the meekness of an inwardly cross lamb, I suffered my woman to dress me.

"Now, see here," said I, "I'm nearly forty and might be left in peace; they won't do it, therefore I won't look forty, my good wench! Give me the new rouge and that fresh box of patches, and lay me out the little gown with the violets."

So I made my face with immense care, lashes and brows ever so deftly darkened, the ceruse laid on till it looked like the fresh complexion that was my best feature in my twenties, and truly, but for my grey curls, through which I ran a violet ribbon, I might well have been in my twenties still! The dress was a bluish-white silk on thin texture, but worked upon it here and here were scattered violets; it was worn over a petticoat of my own lace-work, again supported by another of violet hue; about my shoulders was twisted a gold and violet striped gauze scarf, and, to finish all, fixed by my sapphire and amethyst Tudor clasp set in heavy gold. I laughed as I looked at myself in the mirror. "About fifteen years too young in dress—and deportment," I said. "On their heads be it," and I went through into my parlour.

There was no light there, only the dying June evening shone over the great river that I was never tired of looking at. I leant my elbows on the sill, clasped my hands, and looked out. This desperate sense of something evil!—it terrified as well as angered me. I called to my maid. "Go, fetch me a cordial," I said, "I am none too well to-night. Leave the outer door ajar, then I need not answer it. The Duchess of Richmond may come in on her way; she said she would if 'twere possible."

So I stood and looked out over the river, a girlish

figure with hair, as it were, thickly powdered, and waited, and wondered for what I was waiting.

The outer door swung open, a soft, swift step crossed my floor (but no rustle of silken skirts), some one came behind me, a pair of arms encircled me and quick hands grasped my wrists, a warm cheek rested against mine.

"Sweet cousin, I come to say 'Good-bye,'" said a gentle voice. "Good-bye, only for a very little while. Have you any message for Scotland?"

The strong, slender hands pulled me back till I stood upright, drawn back against laces and a curled (if short) peruke that just touched my bare shoulders as its owner leant forward.

"Silly little pulses," said Monmouth, pressing my wrists with his fingers, "they flutter like caught birds. You are not afraid?"

"I don't know, James," I said, with a long, quivering sigh. "Yes, I *am* afraid, but what I fear I can't tell you. I wish you'd tell me!"

He gave a little laugh into the masses of curls that adorned each side of my head, as the vogue still was—he was an everlastingly caressing creature who had been petted by, and had petted, women all his life. "I can tell you one thing, you need have no fears for *me*."

My door opened again, and into my room walked, without any more ceremony, a tall young man in uniform, and stood looking at us. I wrenched myself from James's clasp, I ran round the table and threw my arms about his neck. "Oh, Ian!" I cried, "so you have come after all?"

I do not think my son ever received me more coldly than he did that time. He let me put my arms round his neck and stand on tip-toe to kiss him, but all the while he was looking over my head at James, a silhouette against the dusky windows, a sil-

houette that did nothing, but, somewhat to my amusement, swore! I took in the whole scene in a glance. I went to the centre table, struck flint and steel, lit my golden-copper Dutch lamp and, as it burned up, dropped both my hands on the table and looked, smiling, from one to the other. With his back to the window stood Monmouth, in simplest of riding gear—buff suit, long boots, a laced cravat but a very simple one, his coat not unbuttoned enough to show his Garter ribbon, his Star hidden by a buff travelling cloak of ample cut, and a big felt hat crowned with a swirling mass of black feathers. Opposite him, his back to the door, in full uniform, was my son, a tall, serious-faced, black Scot, topping me by a head and Monmouth by an inch or two, very quiet, and, as I knew perfectly well, in a dangerous humour. Then, as the lamplight flooded the little room, heels were clicked and there was a smart salute, and something of the tension relaxed. Monmouth, easy, smiling, never embarrassed, took it and burst out laughing, as I did.

"Oh, Ian," I cried again, "our cousin, the Duke. Your Captain-General, my dear! Did you think——? Oh, what did you not think? of your mother, nine years his senior—and you might trust her by now!"

My boy moved round the table and took my hand. "Forgive me," he said, and he bowed deeply to Monmouth.

"Forgive?" cried that same gentleman. "Now damme if appearances aren't against all of us. I——"

"You," I said, "you were thirty last month and you look twenty-three. *I*——"

"Madame ma cousine, I do not care what your age is, I can only say that you look as if you were twenty-three with powdered hair—and this gentleman?"

"This gentleman is my son," I said, "and he *is* twenty-three! He looks the age you really are."

Ian laughed. "So what's to be done about it, sir?" he said.

It was a strange situation. In another five or six years' time I was to look an old woman, but then I did not, and in my girlish dress I was aware of it. My son had never resembled me at all, except that, I was amused to see, his hair was rapidly greying in true Stuart style. He was very tall, with big bones, dark, hawk-featured, but long of face, a perfect Celtic type if ever I saw one, and a look in his eyes as he spoke to you that went out—beyond—somewhat in the way an eagle looks, a dreamer, a scout, a born soldier, as he was. He had fought constantly since he was fifteen; he was never happy unless he was fighting. Of course he was going to Scotland, whether his regiment went or no! Captain Ian Stuart, had the Fates been kind, you might have gone farther than Scotland, I think. Yet I thank Heaven you did not. To have been a British soldier six years later . . . ! You—and I—were spared that.

"Your *son?*" cried the youthful Commander-in-Chief. "Well, Madame, if you say so——! He goes north? Then he goes with me! Come, sir, come, my kinsman, I've room for an A.D.C. Will that suit you?"

Ian came round the table and took Monmouth's hand without a word and kissed it—as if he had been the King himself. I looked on, and a shiver went through me.

"Take care of him, James," I said softly, feeling proud and a little happier; I hoped that on Monmouth's staff my son might be safer, just as any mother wishes who wants her boy to be in the midst of it all, yet unscathed.

So we stood.

And at that moment, to my despair, came one of the Queen's pages summoning me to dance, and I dared not wait any longer. I caught up fan and gloves, I kissed Ian, I was as frankly kissed by Monmouth, and flew after my guide through the maze of dimly lit passages to the Royal apartments, and so into the whirl of the dance before I had time for further thought.

Towards the end of the evening I was summoned by the King—not to dance: it seemed he wished to speak to me.

"Well, my dear," he said, "so James has got your boy?" (The King knew everything always.)

"Yes, Sire," I replied. "I hope he'll serve you well; he has hitherto."

Charles looked at me with night-dark eyes, considering, comprehending, and said nothing. He took my hand and led me across the dancing-room and to a big window open to the June evening; flowers filled the air with scent from the gardens below, a galaxy of stars danced in the deepening blue above our heads.

"He'll serve me well," he said shortly; "have no fear of that."

"I have none," I replied; and, as I spoke, back in a rush flooded my incomprehensible terror. I turned and looked up at him.

"Sire, this will be but a little campaign. After it is over you shall laugh at me, and tell me how much a fool I was to be afraid."

The black eyes still held mine. "I send my son to fight for me, and I too am afraid," said Charles quietly. "No, not as you are; James will never die on the field of battle. That I know. My one hope is, my lady, that I shall not live to see how he doth die."

I stared at him; I felt the ceruse on cheeks and lips standing out where all the rest was ashy white.

"So to each his own fear," said Charles, and then he took my elbow. "You give me your son, do you? Very well, whatever befall—remember this: that there is one thing that a King can never repay to his subjects, he cannot give the mothers back their sons."

"Sire," I said, "you too in turn remember this: We cry upon Heaven for them, upon Fate; upon Death, we never fall on our knees before our Sovereign and say, 'Give us back our boys.' It is a gift for ever and ever."

He looked at me once, he never said anything, he simply led me across the ball-room to the door.

"Go back and go directly to your bed," he said softly, "or you will break down."

He knew that much. He felt the forerunner of a passion of tears fall on his hand as I kissed it; my hurried flight back to my lodgings checked but for an instant the storm that would come and have its way. So I lay face downwards on my bed and cried and cried, and yet I laughed through my tears.

"I've done that for you, Charles," I whispered, "I've given you my son. I shall never ask for him back. He's yours!"

And so he remained, a gift for ever and ever.

Bothwell Brig was soon over, and Monmouth soon back again among ever-growing difficulties and differences. And the rift between him and his father grew and grew, and nothing was ever the same any more.

Charles's love endured, and now and then, for weeks at a time, Monmouth was the spoiled darling, the favoured son he used to be; but the months and the years as they passed took him farther and farther from Charles, and I knew it.

So Ian went to Scotland, and did not come away. He asked for nothing more than to live and die fighting. He had his will, and therefore I, his mother, asked nothing more of Life or Death for him.

Monmouth, immediately after his return to Whitehall, told me all there was to tell and was very kind in his own foolish, loveable, tactless way. What did the folly and the tactlessness matter to me? I knew he was sorry for my bitter loss, that was all I cared about. He said much; and if he said too much—if he said the right thing wrongly—all that signified was that it was the right thing.

And Charles said nothing at all.

But when I saw him next, he passed me in the gallery as I went to the Queen, the centre of a group of his gentlemen, laughing and jesting with them. As our eyes met, his merriment ceased abruptly; he stood still and swept off his great plumed hat to the floor, in the deep bow of a subject to a Sovereign, before his astonished Court. Once again I could not thank him—but in these pages I thank him now.

"ST. STEPHEN'S BY ST. ALBANS"

CHAPTER XVII

"ST. STEPHEN'S BY ST. ALBANS"

For the Stuarts were crowns that they could not win,
For the Stuarts, thrones they could never hold,
For the Stuarts, dishonour and wanton sin,
For the Stuarts, love that can ne'er be told!
Love that is god-like, love that is gold,
Love that recks not of bar or bond,
Love that endures when the heart grows cold,
And into the Life Beyond!

("*King Monmouth*")
M. N.

WHEN I had once won Henrietta Wentworth to love me, and she had thrown her cap over the mill finally as regards Monmouth, and had set herself steadily to reform him while sacrificing herself in the eyes of morality, and of that most immoral Court! the explosion could not be long delayed; and, as we are told, "the Lady Philadelphia" found out the truth and whirled her daughter out of town in a passion at the beginning of 1680. As a matter of fact, this was done partly because she was disappointed that Monmouth was not in such favour at Court as he had been when the love-story first began, and she wished, publicly, to disassociate herself from him; partly because Lord Feversham wanted to marry Henrietta, and the discovery of the true state of affairs put an end to the negotiations with him. Also Henrietta was taking her own line, and only force could have any effect—outwardly. But things did not happen as "Sacharissa" writes.

I had a house near St. Albans, and I retired to that

after Bothwell Brig. You know that Monmouth fled down the Watling Street when he went to Toddington in 1683. Then he wrote in his pocket-book that he passed through St. Stephens's, a most interesting old church and a group of houses, hardly a village. There was a farm, there is still a farm, a smallish house behind part of a solid and lengthy stretch of very old wall opposite the church, and this was my country home then: just a tiny property close to the road, with its barns and stabling, some land, and a delightful garden—looking towards Gorhambury.

When Philadelphia was supposed to have fetched her daughter back to Toddington, as a matter of fact she did nothing of the kind. She *meant* to, but she was foiled! She sent her coach (she had been at Toddington for some time herself, or she would have known earlier how things really were) and a handful of servants to bring Henrietta away. Henrietta, with surprising meekness, wrote to her mother that she would come, and left London as arranged; but as soon as she arrived at my gates, she stopped the coach, told the servants she was taken ill, and sent them to ask me to come out to her aid. I was ready! Out I went, pretending to be horrified when I saw her, insisted on her coming in to rest and refresh herself, ordered refreshments for her people, and, before they knew what had happened, I had her safe in my house, and Philadelphia's retinue, becoming uneasy, and on trying to "collect" their young mistress to proceed to Toddington, suddenly found the gates shut in their faces, and, to their dismay, half a dozen of Monmouth's Guards removing her ladyship's baggage from the coach and politely but firmly speeding empty vehicle and empty-handed servants towards the fury of Philadelphia up the road eleven miles away.

Everything had been arranged beforehand. Those

at Whitehall who were interested knew I was making a stay in the country to settle my little estate; *you* knew, naturally, I need not say, and Charles of course knew, as I had gone to him with Monmouth and told him all the facts, and that I proposed to keep Henrietta with me till after her child's birth. Monmouth being (publicly) very much out of favour with his father, but secretly as good friends as ever, although nominally deprived of all his commands and high places, was still quite able to produce a troop of horse when necessary! Charles, who loathed Philadelphia, chuckled so much over the idea of my kidnapping her daughter on the way home, that all was easy to work. I admit Monmouth and I had to stand an absolute outburst of laughter from His Majesty!—I especially coming in for banter; Charles always used to have a dig at me, and, on paper, this affair of his son's was no better than all the others which I never would deal with except to help him out of—but behind the laughter (in which Monmouth and I joined) we all three *knew the difference*, and: "So you snap your fingers at the old lady?—none so old in her own estimation, eh?" and Charles glanced sidelong at us both, we knowing perfectly well that Philadelphia, incurably ambitious and still handsome, had set her cap at him when she first came to town with her daughter some six years before, and had had the mortification of realising he had apparently never noticed it! He had, and so had we, and we had laughed at the time—this, I think, accounted for some of Henrietta's early antagonism towards me. She had loved Monmouth from the first, so of course she forgave *him*—she did not forgive *me*, I was a woman. She never cared for her mother, but she had seen her discomfited, and I had laughed, and—but she knew me better later.

I think, if Henrietta Wentworth ever had any love

to spare for any woman, it was for me during the last five years of her short life.

Mine was a pleasant little house behind its high walls; there were sheltered walks beneath yew hedges, a typical Hertfordshire cedar, an orchard full of fruit trees, and it was all hidden from the road by its farm buildings and the great wall. Early spring though it was, my parlour caught all the sun, streaming across the broad fields and the spreading woods that shut out Gorhambury.

Henrietta and I would pace up and down in the sunshine, she, waiting for her summer, in all the glow and wonder of the spring for which she had waited so long; I, at last of real use to my beloved James, knowing that at the same time I pleased Charles, able, in their happiness, to forget (sometimes) that not only were my spring and summer taken from me, but that my autumn had found me a barren tree.

Of course we saw no one—country visitors, even Monmouth's friends in St. Albans (for he had always been used to run up and down constantly), meant nothing to me after the company at Whitehall; besides, it was too much of a hotbed of Jenningses and Churchills for my taste! This must read strangely since I am descended from Arabella Churchill, but the self that lived in Charles's Court was quite another *me*, and apart, even, from James II. Also, I wished to keep Henrietta's presence a secret from my neighbours.

Philadelphia once came over in a towering rage, and to her intense surprise, as I afterwards heard was admitted, but all she found was myself in the parlour and a couple of guards at the foot of the stairs!—I, quite placid and serene, receiving her simply, and naturally, as if I were the last person in

the world to grab her only daughter and then hide her. She had to sit down and talk quietly; I refused, with increasingly cool manner and lowered voice—lowered as hers heightened!—with a Carolinely cynical smile on the top of everything, to have anything to do with her unless she complied. I told her I meant to keep her daughter with me, and I could do so (I said it to her face) unaided; if she wished for a trial of strength, why she might talk to the soldiers in the hall, but for myself I would wish her good-day and a pleasant return journey, and so I stood up and curtsied, and she gave in. After all, she knew if there was an object in avoiding a "scandal" (hardly possible when one thought of her own life) at Toddington, it was infinitely better for Henrietta to be safe with me, and yet out of the gossip of town. She was no fool when she was shown how to be sensible, and she, too, was afraid of me when she realised what I stood for with the King of Monmouth.

But another day was much nicer!

There was a bustle in the road outside, wheels, the jingling of harness, men's voices, then a woman's speaking, at which I looked out of the window, and then a masculine laugh, which brought the quick blood to Henrietta's pale cheeks, and my faithful woman was in the room. "Oh, Madame, oh, milady, it is his Grace and Mistress Carey!" and I was in the little hall, to find you at the modest front door, charming and sparkling in a lovely sea-blue cloak and hood, lined with brown fur and carrying a big muff, and Monmouth, 'a sicht for sair e'en,' all in buff cloth with a deep orange sash, and a great buff cloak lined with orange—the blue of his Garter ribbon showing as he swung off his hat joyously. I was hugging you, and only just aware that Monmouth

had put a hand on either of my shoulders from behind, kissed my hair, and was away past us down the hall to the door of the parlour, which closed on him and Henrietta, leaving you and me, laughing and talking both at once. My maids and Monmouth's men were fussing about inside and out of the entrance, in all the pleasant bustle of arrival that must have made the old days so delightful. No, the coach was to go on into St. Albans and be put up at the George Inn, only one of his Grace's men remaining (my maids were disappointed, but I was not altogether sorry!) to be at hand when needed, and I, after a hurried message to my kitchen, whirled you up to my room.

"Now, your news! How goes it all? His Majesty? Ah, James will tell me—*when* I see James! You—you rash woman, running down here like this in his coach with him for all the world to see! Oh, I dare say you did pull that hood well over your head and wear your mask; but really——! and such a hood, why nobody at Court has another sea-blue. French, of course, and the newest embroidered gloves from Martial's—trust Careys to get French things. My dear, you've put on your best clothes to run away with James. Fie! But I am sure you both enjoyed it, and it was all the more fun in that it was an innocent escapade, hey?—think of eloping with James pour le bon motif! Does His Majesty know you were coming? Know? he *told* you to come? to put all our kind friends off the scent? I'faith, they will be off on another scent—hue and cry after *you!* What said you to the King?"

"Sire," you answered, as well as you could for laughing, "I shall look to you to clear my name in Whitehall if need be"; and he returned, "Madame, do you not think your name can clear itself without any assistance of mine? for I doubt if my assistance

would do anything but hinder!" ("Indeed, Charles as a clearer of anybody's character is mightily diverting," I added in parenthesis, and you replied in the same, "Yes, *that* is why I asked him!")

"It is terrible," you went on to me, "to be held up as such a shining light of virtue. Why, it leads me into positions like this."

"That's the worst of virtue, my dear," I retorted; "it has its drawbacks. It is so useful to those who haven't any. That poor child under my wing? Ah, it's no question of 'virtue' or of 'vice' with her, it's one man out of all the world, and the rest of us merely accessories, or drawbacks, or of no account whatsoever. We're shadows—kind shadows, even you and I, even the King. One man—and is he a man? I've known James so long."

"So has she."

"Yes, she's known James as all the other women's lover; I've known him as *James;* but now, she knows the James she's made of him."

"And what is that?" you asked.

"Only she knows," I said, and laid down your cloak on my bed. "Don't let us be serious yet. And—ah, my dear, your frock! The cloak was cruel enough to a country dowd like me," and I glanced down at my black woollens, "but this, too. His Majesty must have provided you with a trousseau to fly with James. That bronze-coloured silk and those little bunches of coloured flowers all over it, are they worked by hand? No, woven in—more French goods. Egad, Madame, are you in the pay of His most Christian Majesty Louis? Oh, I'll tell you a tale! M. Barrillon 'approached' me once when first I came to Whitehall. A silver lace dress—exquisite. 'Sir,' I said, 'I take it kindly of your master; will you give him my most grateful compliments in re-

turn,' and he looked much taken aback. 'No more than your grateful compliments, Madame?' he inquired pointedly. 'Why, sir,' I laughed, 'we English once sold you Dunkirk, now your king is turned shopkeeper with insignificant ladies like me? His goods come to the wrong address, I fear, let me re-direct them,' and I opened my doors and drew him into the gallery—pointing down it in the direction of another set of rooms—you know whose. 'My woman shall carry the gown there, sir,' I said. 'It would not fit me,' and I bowed him out. Charles? Oh, Charles was angry with me—the only time! 'Your Majesty,' I said to him, 'look you, I can serve you better than that. Which of your fair ladies would not that gown fit? King Louis will write me off his list as useless—too good, too stupid. Sire, I am not too good, I am not too stupid—forgive me, *and wait*. I will serve you better than that!'

"And I have served him better. I have cheated France, I have plotted and listened and worked and lied for him. Charles knows! I had those self-same silver skirts swept contemptuously over my feet at the next ball, while I was purposely dressed in dowdy brown 'atlas.' But I had the laugh! And Barrillon was there, and caught my eye as the silver skirts flounced past. He bowed deeply and permitted himself one glare at me, afterwards! He did not understand; he thought me too good, too stupid. I'd hang at Tyburn cheerfully for Charles, and probably shall. Come into the garden, my friend, there are few flowers to see, but I've no parlour to offer you—*yet*," and we went downstairs merrily, arm in arm.

"Such shoes! that new French shoemaker his Grace patronises; I know his cut. It is lucky the coach did not break down, they would not be enhanced by Hertfordshire mud. Slip on a pair of my

gardening buskins," and we went out into the yellow sunlight, with the blue-black cedar up against a pale sky and the foxy-brown of the beech hedges and the purple and grey of the woods beyond.

"James looks well," I remarked. "I believe he is happy for the first time, before, he was only enjoying himself."

The soft murmur of voice came through the mullioned window of the parlour, farther on, from my kitchen premises, the rather less subdued chatter of my excited maids with His Grace's footman. I laughed.

"Look," I said, "there is Pré Wood. Beyond that is Gorhambury, the seat of that wise old gentleman Sir Harbottle Grimston—Speaker—Master of the Rolls. He helped bring the King over, and he is ending his life as he has led it all along, in an open detestation of popery. He is a very old man now, he will not live to see a popish king on the throne. Shall *we?* But I am always getting back to serious subjects. Dinner will be served directly. Well, I have had a chance to see you at last. What are your plans? Go you back to-night? James is sending you back in his coach? My dear, I wish I could keep you, but I have not a corner now—James stays here, I suppose; he knows he can come and go as he pleases. Will you be safe alone? But perhaps," and here we both burst out laughing, "it will be better for you to return alone than with James!"

"Why, no," you said. "Had we returned together the world would have said he repented of the trip and had turned back with me!"

"And if you arrive by yourself, the world will say you repented of the trip and have turned back without him," and we went towards the house, still laughing.

The parlour window opened and Monmouth leant

out. (I could see Henrietta's face, no longer pale, but beautifully flushed, over his shoulder.) "Ladies, ladies!" said he, shaking his curls at us, "this is frivolous. I bring you Mistress Carey to wait on you, cousin—kind Mistress Carey, who accompanies me into exile" (a glance back at Henrietta, full of mischief)—"and you treat it all as a joke. I hear you laughing *up*stairs, and then you come laughing *down*stairs and you walk together and talk scandal beneath the windows till I am grieved to the heart and—am consumed with curiosity to know what you are saying!"

"Were we talking of anything to interest James?" I asked you. "Surely one theme was Madame Carey's character?—or was it popery?—or was it dinner? That should be interesting to your Grace. Come, will you hand Madame Carey in to the dining-room?" and I slipped Henrietta's hand under my arm, and she pressed it, laughing softly and smiling, and looking at you and Monmouth as we stood back and made you both lead the way. She only *looked* at me, and said nothing, but her look was enough. "Isn't he adorable?" it said.

Truly he was! I loved him, I had always loved him, even without being in love with him; so what must have he been to her with whom he had found love for the first time?—after her wait, her long wait, years and years, till he should find it, and her with it.

"Mistress Carey vows she is not hungry, but I am!" he was saying. "Why, she would have nothing when we changed horses at Astra" (Elstree); "not so much as a cup of chocolate. I tell you, I swallowed my 'morning' so fast, not to keep her waiting without, that our good landlady shook her head over me. 'Your Grace my lord Duke,' she said, 'you're in a mighty hurry. That's not doing justice to good ale.' 'A lady waits me, wife,' I

replied. 'Ah, my lord, does she so? But if you strangle, she'll have to wait the longer.' Think if I *had* strangled," he suggested seriously to you. "Why, what then?"

"I should have returned to the King, sir," you said demurely, "and have informed His Majesty that you had put our kind friends off the scent for good and all!"

So we ate my simple fare, and we all sat over the fire in the dying light while the footman went into St. Albans for the coach, and when it came, you were wrapped up warmly and bestowed in it, and His Grace's servants given every instruction for your safety; and so you drove away and James and I went back up the flagged path to the house. As we went, he took my elbow. "She's well, she's happy, she's safe here," he said (I am afraid *you* had passed from his thoughts as soon as he shut the door on you)! "Shall I go now, dear? or can you put up with me for twenty-four hours?"

"Twenty-four years, James," I smiled, "if you will. This house is yours."

"It holds my heart," he said, "my heart, and my kindest friend—and peace, for a space. There is no peace elsewhere," and he sighed.

"There is no peace for us when we court war," I returned, looking straight at him, "but leave war and 'elsewhere' alone for to-night, at any rate. You need think of no one but her, oh, not me, no, you needn't think of me, nor even of yourself!" and I gave him a little flick with my finger under his cleft chin, quite a long way up for me to reach. "Go in and tell Henrietta you love her."

"But she knows it," he said, standing still in the dusk of the porch looking down at me with shining eyes.

"Doubtless," I answered, "but I'll wager she'd

like to hear it again. Why, you've been away from her at least five minutes," and we went indoors together.

A while later I was in my room, changing my plain heavy blacks for something lighter and less gloomy before supper. I think I envied you a little, rolling back along the old Roman road to the lights of London—to the old life I had left a few months back, and yet, it seemed, for years. You were to be present at a concert the next night that the King would attend (at Prince Rupert's, in his beautiful saloon), and I knew he would be certain of a veiled word or two with you. "Ah, Madame Carey, so you do not desert us for ever? Has the country no attractions after all?" and he would laugh and show his splendid teeth, and you would curtsey (in your latest evening gown of pale primrose satin, with a gauze scarf of ivory, primrose and black twisted in your hair with a long dangling tassel to your shoulder, your locks turned waving back in the new mode, rather high, with a careless loose curl or two)—curtsey, and smile, half behind a fan of primrose feathers with a tiny mirror in the centre—the very latest—and dimple, and interject, "None for me, Sire; others"—you would pause imperceptibly—"others find happiness there, but give me *your* company!"

And Charles, shaking all over, catching your meaning at once, but inclined to disguise the play between him and you all the better by taking would-be knowing courtiers into his confidence (apparently), would look at the faces round about him, and retort, "Oddsfish, you have it, Madame, for what it's worth!" and everybody would laugh at the prudish Madame Carey who yet eloped with the Duke and told His Majesty she couldn't live without him!—and nobody but you two would understand one word. Oh, those games that we played with Charles, you and I. History

says naught of them, for History saw naught. History has only enhaloed Mrs. Godolphin because she never would talk to the King, but we talked, aye, and we acted, and we deceived the clever bad men and annoyed the clever bad women, and Charles literally revelled in it.

I don't think anybody ever caught you out—and only once me. That was at another evening at Prince Rupert's—Prince Rupert, half Stuart himself, shadow of his past brave days, old, ill, wrapped up in his mezzo-tinting and his chymical experiments, doting father of that exquisite left-handed Stuart, his daughter Ruperta—and I know we (even I) were prone to think he saw nothing too. Just such an incident had occurred—it was a little later, after my return to London. I had brought Charles news of Monmouth in the same way, all in public, had given him the desired intelligence by letting him tease and, in company, utterly confound me, and had got up a most creditable blush of confusion (really a flush of triumph!) as I fell back and he passed laughing on, with Barrillon and Sunderland, enjoying my supposed discomfiture, at his heels.

And as I drew aside, I found myself by my host, and realised he had been watching the by-play a little apart, and he glanced at me out of his long melancholy eyes (some of his portraits are Mary Queen of Scots, his great-grandmother, to the life) and murmured, "Ah, Madame Stuart, a diplomatist was lost in you."

"In me, Highness?" I replied in the same tone. "How cruel of you to say 'lost,' on the top of His Majesty's satire. See how meekly I take my setting-down! I might have known a silly old woman like me would provoke the Court's derision."

But he put a hand on my shoulder and patted it in a fatherly way—Prince Rupert was quite twenty years my senior. "Nay, my dear lady, none so old, none so silly, none so useless—never say that of a Stuart to a Stuart."

"Oho!" I thought to myself, "here is a man who sees what he looks at, and hears what he listens to." Aloud I said, "Mon prince, you are a Stuart, a soldier, a scientist, and an artist, also, like me, a looker-on. Thank you!"

I think that was the last time I had any talk with his Highness; his health broke altogether soon after and he died before long. But no—once more we met and talked at ease, for he asked you and me to spend the day in his apartments in Spring Gardens, which we did with intense joy, and he showed us all his treasures and his discoveries, and, later, told us stories of his wild boy- and young-man-hood, and at the end he gave me a tiny illuminated *Book of Hours* that had belonged to the Winter Queen, and you an example of his engraving, and he said something to us both before we departed, standing all three together in one of the windows flooded with summer sunshine. He was plainly and even shabbily attired, with none of his youthful fascination and finery left, and you and I, the one in black and purple striped silk, the other in beech-leaf-brown taffeta, stood on each side of him. He looked from you to me, and then he put a long sensitive hand, albeit stained with the results of his hobbies, on each of our arms.

"Ladies," he said, "forgive a garrulous old man whose day is over, and who is despised by the present generation—all these young wits and bloods, these fickle fine dames. I know you for something else, the King's friends. Madame Carey, I would you could be more at Court. His Majesty has need of such as you, but your post is elsewhere? Well, he is the loser.

Madame Stuart, you"—he gave a sudden twinkle amazingly like Charles, whom I never thought he resembled—"you run your little errands and wear these wintry tresses"—he touched the curl on my shoulder—"to show you're past the game, eh? the game they play, these young gallants and frail ladies the King spends all his *public* time with!"

"Why, sir," I said, "wintry tresses are the only wear when the snows have begun to fall; I'm obliged to look forty in the face, and I might as well be four hundred, might I not, in Whitehall? But if I were twenty, sir, of what use could I be to him? And, sir, we—he and I—are both glad I'm forty, see you?"

"Oh, aye, I see," said Prince Rupert, with a wise smile. "It's a good age for a good woman and a good friend."

"Oh, but I'm not good, Highness!" I said indignantly, knowing he would understand exactly, and he laughed.

"No," he said, "not good, of course, your pardon, no Stuart was ever good. But still, you're good for Charles," and he laughed at the phrase, "and Mistress Carey is better—she leaves your errands alone."

"Does she?" I said, emboldened—I knew we could trust Rupert—"do you, chérie?" and you replied, smiling at us both, "Oh yes, of course; I only run on my own." And we all laughed together. He gave our wrists a little squeeze and a shake, the Stuart trick.

"Ah, well, Mesdames, you're active yet, but remember—hasten slowly. No woman ever recollected *not to run too fast.*"

"Did she not?" you asked. "But, sir, if she runs too slowly she will be caught!"

"Not when she runs errands," smiled Rupert back at you. "Only when she runs from a man." We

looked at each other and tried to be serious in vain.

"Sir, sir!" I said, "you'll never think that of *us;* why——"

"Never," said Rupert, "never. Had I thought you in that danger, should I have warned you to slacken your pace? You may win laurels in other ways than Daphne's," and he kissed our hands, and we made him the deep Royal curtsey.

"Now we must do more running—running away," I remarked. "Not for our lives—no, for our reputations! It grows quite dark, Highness, and we have been here hours, oh, but hours."

"Time also hastens," said Prince Rupert. "Come again, and cheer a slow old man who once travelled faster than any of these galloping Hectors."

"I know, sir; who does not? I think, compared with your life, mine is but sitting still."

"Aye, but there may be worse things. My cousin the King sits on his throne (long may he sit there) and I in my chimney corner."

"Long may you sit there, Highness!" we said, and went down the broad honey-coloured polished stairs. "We will—*crawl*—here again if it is your pleasure."

But we never did; that was our last visit to Rupert of the Rhine.

"Sharp eyes," I said, looking rather hard at you as our coach rolled away from the door. "Sharp wits, and they think him an old fool on the shelf. I wonder if we are as wise as we think ourselves."

You laughed. "My Lord Rochester thinks me a fool," you said. "He praised my green brocade with the Paris laces. He said it was a relief to his mind to see me in such fine clothes; he had feared I

was given to piety or politics, else, now he was sure I was as versed in the arts of coquetry as—there he left it!"

"There perhaps he was wise to leave it," I retorted. "But I'll sound his lordship when next he comes to Court. They say he's parlous ill, but I hope not. He's mighty clever, but it's not the clever ones that suspect us as a rule. They're too clever. But I'll deal with him. If he has written a lampoon on you, of course you're lost ('To Sophia, in the French manner,' eh?). Not because of the scandal in his verse, but because he thought you notorious enough to write about. I vow when I boxed his ears——"

"But he wrote nothing then, did he?" you asked in an awed voice.

"No," said I with a chuckle, "but I did. And not one soul ever knew it was I! But did he not guess, for who was to know it had happened? Oh, he heard me telling the tale to all the maids of honour the same evening, and—he's a gentleman—he joined in and improved upon my story, and we've been firmer friends since then than ever."

"Heigho!" you remarked, with a sigh, "this means more fine clothes and further public snubbing from His Majesty."

"Indeed it does," I replied. "It's your turn next. I'll warn him. 'Charles, Madame Carey should be put in her place.' "

So I did, and Charles replied, "Ah, cousin, so she should be, but she is never out of it."

WE TAKE OUR TURNS ON THE RACK

CHAPTER XVIII

WE TAKE OUR TURNS ON THE RACK

Oh then, 'tis oh then that I think there's no hell
Like loving too well.

CHARLES II.

"I WILL not see him. Understand me, I will not. If you are wise, milady, you will say your prayers and hold your tongue, but you will not meddle further in this matter. At least you will not trouble me. Do I make myself quite plain to you?"

The smouldering eyes gleamed wickedly up under the lowered lids, the under lip projected—jutted—pressed outward by the upper, the chin was firmly propped by the clenched fist that supported it. The King was angry, and the King had a right to be.

I was a fool, but I was no coward, for all I was badly scared! I had tried cajolery, diplomacy, wide-eyed naïveté, deception so wily that it surprised even myself, tears a few, smiles a many—and I was beaten. Soundly beaten now, since my last effort cost me the unmasking of all my batteries, a direct personal request, a favour to be granted for my own sake—and a slap-in-the-face refusal as its answer from King Charles.

"Pah! that blockhead sends all you women crazy. He bamboozles Louise, and she's a wise woman; he hath that featherhead Nell on his side, and she used to be a sensible baggage. Her poor Majesty——!" (a quick shake of the head and a sardonic shrug).

"Now's for you, Charlotte Stuart. Oddsfish, I thought better of *you!*"

This was bad. I stood by the window of my parlour, my hands, twisted together, rested on the wide sill, my troubled eyes roamed unseeing over the tumbled grey waste of Thames in flood. My Royal master and kinsman cast himself back in his chair, every line of the tall carelessly dressed figure betraying unusual irritation, and, what was worse! a firmness of purpose I had done my poor best to shake, and had but rendered still firmer. And I was playing a dangerous game. I had promised Monmouth to induce his justly incensed father to accord him one more interview—just one. If I failed, he would swear I had failed *him;* if I really angered Charles, I should lose all that made life worth while to me. I stood between the devil and the deep sea, for Monmouth was desperate—and in truth he was up to his neck in well-merited disgrace—and Charles was adamant. Dear Heaven, these Stuarts! I wished I were not so horribly frightened; also I wished still more heartily that the King did not see it quite so plainly!

There was no inspiration to be drawn from the grey heaving tide without. My restless glance dropped nervously to the honey-yellow agate bowl on the sill, to my tawny velvet gown with its gold laces and broideries of topaz in the Persian mode, a lovely dress which I recall I had had made in honour of the Prince of Hanover's visit when he came to court—vainly—the wayward, stubborn Princess Anne. A grand dinner was just over, and I had slipped away as soon as I could from the Banqueting Hall and had returned to my own rooms, worried, weary, puzzled as to what I should do next, hoping for a little peace and time for thought—to have the King, in a most flinty mood, come in on my heels. In my hand I still held, hurriedly crumpled, a passionate (and very

badly spelt!) billet of Monmouth's—thrust there in the press by a lady whose oar pulled in that galley came as a shock to me!—the imploring phrases burning themselves into my memory:

"Bring this about and I will serve you till death." And: "You have his ear; he heeds you when he will listen to no one else; he will see you when he is denied to all the world. Madame ma cousine, the sweetest friend I ever had, of your kind white magic conjure your obedient servant this miracle. I am at your feet as always." "You and I know his heart; secure for me one moment alone with him, and I can touch it as of old. He will never deny you—and then he will never again deny me. And oh, Madame, I vow to you. . . ."

A pest on it! Only too well I knew that five minutes of Monmouth with Charles would mean the wilful way won afresh, the too kind, too lenient father once more as soundly bamboozled as the wise Louise, the shrewd Sovereign rendered as feather-headed as the baggage Nell. But Charles knew too; he was aware of his son's power and his own powerlessness to resist him, the while he laughed at us women for being turned round that wheedling, caressing finger. Charles knew! I stole a fearful glance at him in the silence, lifting wary eyes from the contemplation of my gold-laced corsage. He smiled sarcastically at me across the room, looking diabolical.

"Little fool," said my beloved monarch, most unkindly!

"A big fool, Sire," I murmured, dropping my eyes again hurriedly, and pleating the folds of my gown in seemingly nervous fingers. "Big enough, old enough, to know better, but a fool in—let me say a numerous if not good company. Yes. Admitted we are beguiled, he doth work on our feelings, he trieth every art, but, Your Majesty, he is in downright earnest

now. Remember, Sire, never hath he been laid so lowly under the heavy ban of your displeasure; never before have you refused, over and over, to let him say one word in his own defence."

"*One* word?" ejaculated Monmouth's father, with a short laugh like a bark. "*One* word! He will hurl a thousand at me till I am deaf and dumb and stupid—aye, as stupid as he is. He turns my head to wood like his own. He used to have no tongue, now he is a parrot—a parrot, Madame, that reels off its lesson post-haste for fear of the cloak cast over its cage. I can throw no cloak over that young rake-hell's head, no!—so I will see he doth not put it inside Whitehall. I want not words, I want deeds. I only ask of him moderately decent conduct. I have told him so till I am weary. He must stop these wild sand-gallopings up and down with avowed rebels. He hath sworn—oh, I'll say that for James, he doth not often swear—but the last time I gave him my orders he cried out that 'God might damn him if he ever meddled more with them,' and I, cousin, I agreed. I told him I hoped he would be taken at his word! And now"—the King grasped the arms of his chair and leant forward in my direction, driving his words home—"hark you, as I bade James hearken. 'Since we are being serious,' I said, 'I'll give you this bit of Scriptural advice: "My son, fear thou the Lord and the King, and meddle not with them that are given to change."' Yet here he is in the toils once more; they have him, knaves, traitors, cut-throats, republicans all. 'Know a man by his friends,' they say. James's friends are the scum of the nation. Deny it, my girl! You cannot."

Again he leaned his cleft chin on his fist and glowered venomously at me. I left the window with a gesture half of despair, half of repudiation of past arguments, a casting away of Monmouth's allies and

Monmouth's methods—I went to my old position before the fireplace, a hand on the mantelpiece, a foot on the hearth, and began again:

"Your Majesty speaks the truth——" to be caught up delightedly by Charles.

"Do I so?" he remarked, the snakelike glance turning to a gleam of amusement. "Now that is indeed a mistake! If you can so work upon my feelings, mistress, as to make me forget myself thus far, it should be easy for you to force me into seeing James. But that is beyond you. You are a rash woman—do you guess how rash? You are pitting your power over me against that of her Grace of Portsmouth, against that gipsy Nelly's. You think you can succeed where they fail? Heaven has given you a good conceit of yourself! Why, tell me why, if I refuse them whom I love with the whole of . . . well, well, with a portion of my heart, should I succumb to you whom I do not love at all?"

There was a deadly little hush in the room. This was fighting with the buttons off the foils with a vengeance, and we both knew it. And he was deliberately hurting me, defenceless because a suppliant, for the reason that he was in pain himself. Dear Heaven, how Monmouth made us who loved him pay! It was nearly unendurable.

I turned fiercely upon the King like a trapped rat emboldened by sheer extremity. "*Because* of that, Your Majesty," I replied in a tone of ice; "*because* you do not love me, because you rather dislike me, Sire, a silly old woman who presumes on your past kindness. Silly would not matter, but old?—faugh, I shall yawn at myself in a moment. Why, your courtiers would laugh at you for ever listening to me. Where is my dead Lord Rochester? 'Tis enough to

raise him from the grave to write another lampoon on you and the antique coquette who whines for your favour, whose favours you could never be troubled to seek——"

I had lost my temper outright. No one, no, not a king, not the King himself, had the right to strike at this joint in my harness. If he had forgotten himself (as for one fleeting instant he had), I too would do some forgetting!

"Love me?" I laughed, and faced him fairly. "Do you think, Sire, do you think I would have taken your bounty and lived under your roof, risked your anger and (what is much more dangerous) your weariness, allowed you—yes, Sire, *allowed* you—to come in and out of these rooms as you will, the door shut on us for hours together, your gentlemen dismissed, and I, Sire, at your service whenever you chose—do you think, your gracious Majesty, if there had ever been a question in your mind of gallantry between us, that all this would have been possible? Because you did not love me it has all been possible; because you do not love me I dare to make you hate me, and I ask this boon of you that the ladies you love have failed to procure. I tell you, Charles, without flinching, to your face, that you have to grant it. For justice' sake see his Grace. Not as your erring son—as your subject who sues for pardon. Not as my kinsman, but as the man I love, Charles."

The King never took his eyes from my face all through this stinging speech. At its close he sat like a statue. I held my breath, but I still faced him. Then he got up very slowly and laid a heavy hand on each of my shoulders; none too gently he turned me to the afternoon light that flowed in grey from the grey water, and met my fixed gaze with brows no less serried.

"So you love *him?*" He smiled, but his teeth

were set. "Out with it—the truth! You have said a hard thing to me to-day, you have accused me of speaking it! Now you shall speak it yourself. You love him?—answer me."

I gave a little laugh and shut my eyes. "*No*," I said!

He let one shoulder go, he held up a long thin finger right in front of my face, and shook it at me, at the same time giving a little shake of the shoulder he still held.

"Now let this be a warning to you, you jade," remarked Charles II. "Never you tell the truth again! I'll see that damned young rogue; send him to Chiffinch to-night after supper, before I repent," and he picked up hat and gloves and walked to the door. There he paused, and the man I knew came back to me.

"My dear," he added with a little crooked smile, "we have hurled a few—facts and fibs at each other's heads this evening! I think, since we are sensible people, we will agree to forget most of this conversation, eh? You did not mean to be so frank, and I forced you into it—h'm, a mistake, not on your part, on mine. Never forget to stick to a lie. It's worse than useless else, and you are proved a fool. You knew you were one at the beginning of our talk, and now at the end I tell you so. And James is another, and I myself"—he gave a strange little turning movement of his supple wrist and looked down into the open palm of his right hand as if he expected to see something in it—"I am a knave."

Yes, perhaps he was. For he should never have made me say what I said to him that afternoon, and he should not have told me he did not love me, although it was true.

Oh, what did it matter—what did I matter? Less

than nothing. Now to find James and send him posting to the Cabinet by the Water ere repentance should come to the King! Where to find them? If he had not been forbidden the palace, Mistress Crofts's lodgings in the Stone Gallery might have yielded him up. I searched through his creased note—characteristic, no date, no address. Neither ink nor paper was that which he usually employed, but, gadzooks, whose were they? I raised the letter close to my face the better to study it—the slightest whiff of orange essence floated in the air. Mrs. Gwyn, for a kingdom! That saucy cat, flaunting her old calling—Nelly held her oranges under our noses and cried them, metaphorically, as openly as ever.

Monmouth was probably with her, he supped there on many nights; they were whole-heartedly friends who had once been whole-heartedly enemies. If I could not find him with her, perhaps she would know where to seek for him. So—a billet to her address. Nay, if he were not there, and not expected, that were useless. A billet to her?—but she might be abroad. I sighed. "A chair, I think, Madame Stuart!" I said to myself, and summoned my woman forthwith, commanded a sedan, was wrapped in a dark mantle, duly masked, and set forth without flourish of trumpet from the sober little doorway near Will Chiffinch's offices for the ex-actress's fine house in Pall Mall. It was better to be one's own messenger when running Royal errands.

Mrs. Gwyn was within, yes, but she did not receive. Her somewhat supercilious lackey looked over my public chair and my none too modishly habited men, yawned and leant back against the doorpost. I drew back the curtain and spoke sharply. "Send me Nokes, my good fool," and smiled behind my vizard to see his change of front. Now Mr. Nokes was Nelly's butler, invaluable, a confidential servant, seldom

in evidence, but quite well known to me. His mistress and I had been on good terms from the first, and (take it as in my favour or the reverse) my friend's servants were always at my beck and call. Nokes was bowing at my chair door in an instant. "See here," I said swiftly and softly from behind my mask. "I am Madame Stuart from His Majesty. Is the Duke of Monmouth with Mrs. Gwyn?"

"He is expected momently, Madame. My mistress bade them deny her for that reason; but permit me to inform her that you are without."

"Why, do," I said, "and that I must have a word with her or his Grace, one or t'other," and a minute later I was in Nelly's cabinet.

A beautiful room it was, of fair proportions, filled (over-filled) with pretty things, sweet with flowers, picturesquely untidy, with "Nelly" written all over it. I surveyed the scene with tolerant amusement. A lovely little red and white spaniel stretched up my gown to lick my hand, a cageful of rare foreign birds fluttered at the wires for sugar-plums. From the bedroom beyond voices sounded. I knew I should not have long to wait! The King's mistress—the King's friend! There was a bond of union between this gay butterfly and my quiet brown moth self, unbreakable, our changeless loyalty. Each of us appreciated that in the other; we were allies, we served alike (perhaps we suffered sometimes), and we loved alike. Mrs. Gwyn had no cause whatever to be jealous of me—that I might be jealous of her never entered her kind curly head, nor indeed any other head than my own, or shall I say my heart? But I was never jealous; put it down to my credit. No woman of the King's ever caused me a heart-ache, for to my own private belief I clung—and cling still. He never loved any woman as he loved his son James, whom I adored and spoiled and

slaved for and mothered, and for whom I had no heart left. . . .

The bedroom door was ajar, obviously. There was the sound of something tearing, then that of an unmistakable slap! To this succeeded a round oath straight from Drury Lane—and the door flew wide open.

"Go to the devil!" said Mrs. Ellen over her shoulder. "And tell him from me you'll suit him exactly. Mend that smock before you go, though." Then to me:

"Madame, your servant! You seem to me an angel after these children of Belial. Tell me, Mistress Stuart, do you ever box your wenches' ears and swear and split your finest shift from neck to heels? Not you, you're too pretty bred. But I'd give a good deal to see you quiet ladies lose your tempers. Perhaps you never do?"

She curtsied—I laughed. "Why, I've just been losing mine outrageous, that I'll confess to you. Nay, I didn't swear nor slap nor split anything that I can remember and—no, I'm not going to tell you with whom I lost it, you want to know too much. But here I am, forcing my way in upon you, and you denied to everybody but somebody. Nelly, forgive me. It is that tiresome boy, plague take him! I shall speed him to the devil with my compliments next"—("Faith, he can go with my maid, she's a damned pretty piece," interjected my hostess)—"and I had to see him, or you yourself. I dared trust no one. His Majesty bids him attend his pleasure at Will's to-night without fail. At last! at last! Oh, I have had such an afternoon's work and was most handsomely trounced by the King for my pains. Phew, I'm dead of it."

Nelly looked at me roguishly, her blue eyes slowly screwing up till they were almost invisible, her red

lips parting in a hearty and most infectious peal of laughter.

"So you won't tell me with whom you lost your temper? Well, no, Madame, I wouldn't if I were you! And his Grace is to go to the devil?—won't you leave him to his father instead, just for to-night? Meantime, if you'll pardon my being all unready" (she glanced down at her exquisite lace undress and put her hands in mock dismay to her tumbled curls), "won't you stay supper yourself and meet the rascal? 'Tis just about to be served. Nokes, rat you! bid Madame's chair put up"—this was cried into the corridor from the closet door—"and hasten those slugs; we'll sup immediately. Wait for his Grace? May I die if I wait another minute! Dukes are cheap when one's hungry. Madame, let me conduct you"—this with a complete change of tone. A small pink hand was inserted beneath mine, Nelly, with the prettiest gallant air, as if suddenly enacting one of her famous male parts, handed me from the cabinet to another door and through into the well-known mirror-lined dining saloon. "You have earned a glass of Rhenish, surely," she said with a charming grace to me. "Pleading with a man, getting one's way with a man, quarrelling with a man—'tis hard work. Even so clever a lady as you can't do everything in one sentence."

"Hardly," I said drily. "'Twould be a long sentence, that, anyhow. I'm weary enough, and I know your Rhenish of old. I deserve a bottle."

"You shall have six," replied Nelly. "Nokes, open six bottles for Madame Stuart."

"Lord!" I cried, "if James is to get to the King, if he is even to get the message sending him there, I had best *begin* on one. One, my good Nokes!"

So went our gay supper. The servants left the room. The soft radiance of many wax candles, set

in splendid silves sconces, lit up the entire apartment; the table was heaped with fruit and crowded with magnificent plate, fine porcelain, the latest crystal; flowers were massed everywhere. The windows were open to the outer air, and Nelly and I, seated in our luxurious chairs, were reflected a hundred times in the mirrors lining the walls, aye, even the ceiling—Nelly and I, Nelly and I!—over and over again, look where you would. Her nut-brown curls, yellow in the candleshine, her pink and white complexion of a child, her rounded babyish figure, her dimpled hands, laughter incarnate and irresponsible youth, quick wit and madcap spirits, made an alluring whole. Woman though I was, Nelly held me always under her spell, no matter that she came from the purlieus of The Lane, could not name her father, and would have been better without the mother of whom she was never ashamed.

She lounged there; the adorable lace wrapper, loose in the sleeves and open at the neck, was carelessly held together by a pearl-worked girdle, pearls were in her ears, pearls on her fingers. I sat more erect in my brown velvet and gold laces, my head dressed with more ordered, yet as profuse curls, if grey, my eyes still bright, my cheeks as pink, ceruse or no, as typically a figure of the Restoration Court, playing an incomprehensible part in the middle of it all, engaged now in doing my little best to steer straight the very crooked course of that most arrant young blackguard of the time. With the help, too, of the Protestant Mistress, bracketed with the Protestant Duke! Irresistibly funny—I laughed aloud.

But the night was speeding; if James did not soon come, I must find him somehow, or the priceless opportunity would be lost. We had supped early. I looked at the little beaten-gold watch that hung at my waist. Charles usually supped late, but even

so I had only an hour in hand. I glanced towards my hostess and rose.

"I must go," I said. "He cannot be coming, and he must be found. I must chase him all over the town like the watch—not for the first time hath he been so chased!—unless you can tell me whence he was to come here?"

She shook her golden head. "But hark," she said, "he arrives, I think," and hardly had the words left her mouth than there was a bustle in the hall outside; voices, footsteps, a couple of footmen threw open the great double doors, and in walked—King Charles!

Oaths are catching, they say; never was I nearer borrowing from Nelly's choicest vocabulary than at the moment when I had to rise, and curtsey, and smile as my King came in, murmur an echo to Mrs. Gwyn's laughing greeting—though she, I confess, threw herself back in her chair in uncontrollable merriment—play, in short, the part indicated, only too conscious that the tail of Charles's malicious eye was observing my every expression. What was the use of acting before the King?—one never took him in, and he was always so dreadfully amused at one's miscarried efforts. I was perfectly certain it was no surprise to him to catch me there, he must have guessed in an instant that I had come to waylay his son; that this son had never arrived, and that I was waylaid by himself only added zest to the joke. Not for the first time that evening did I wish Monmouth at the devil!

His father bowed with immense gravity to my curtsey. "So we meet again, cousin? Nelly, I find you entertaining an angel very much aware. Angels know what they are about, it is to be hoped. You've already called her one? A change from your usual visitors. Now that I've come you'll have to put up

with the reverse again. And you were expecting that cherub or seraph, my son? His wings haven't carried him here yet. Madame Stuart, yours carry you away—why such haste?" as I endeavoured to back noiselessly out into the shadows and slip off without further ceremony. (At all costs I must carry word to the servants to admit Monmouth if he arrived, or if possible see him for a moment myself.) Charles glanced at me more snakelike than ever, and shook silently with mirth. "So you glide out to go over to the enemy—I know you," he chuckled; "a whispered warning to Bruce kicking his heels in the hall, old Nokes held by the button: 'Keep his Grace fast by the leg if he tries to run away!'—pickets thrown out all down Pall Mall, and the rest of it."

I threw back my head and leaned laughing against the edge of the table. "Sire, you have me defeated again, you, like Mrs. Gwyn, know too much."

"I always did," said Charles.

He bent from where he sat at the head of the table, reached an arm across the corner and took hold of my flowing skirts. "A chair, Madame! Now sit you down, goose, and don't trouble your pretty head further. A glass of Rhenish with you to drink confusion to James's bosom friends (all but yourself!) as he drank it with me half an hour ago. I thought that would startle you—Rhenish is not good for velvet gowns, eh? Send the bill in to me; I owe you something, my dear. Nay, Nell, I've already supped. James and I honoured Will with our company this hour gone."

I sat and stared in front of me. The spilt wine glistened on the folds of the velvet and in my tall goblet like liquid topaz; the King's glass clinked against the rim of mine.

"My lady," said the deep voice, "drink and be

merry. That boy has cost you—and me—enough for one day. I shall begin to think the 'No' you hurled at me this afternoon should have been 'Yes' in spite of everything."

I raised my eyes to his and my glass to his glass, and then touched the rim with lips that quivered in a smile. He stretched out his hand again and patted mine very kindly, and said, half to himself: "But if you must be a fool, Charlotte, I'm glad it's for James"—the concluding speech of one of the most extraordinary conversations—in two parts—that I have ever had with any one.

Nelly still lay back in her chair, silent for once, as she well knew how to be when necessary, serious till we laughed again, immovable till I got up to go. I took my leave; she went with me to the door. "All's well!" she whispered, sparkling with mischief. "The Duke hath his own way. Tell his Grace I waited supper for him for three hours! Give you good-night, Madame, and sweet dreams. You have won the last throw."

"Have I?" I said. The multiple mirrors cast back at me, as I stood just beyond the door with my hand in hers, a tall weary figure, sunk moodily in its seat, twisting with restless fingers the stem of an empty glass. "Heaven send I've done *him* no wrong," I whispered. "We take our turns on the rack for James, I think. Go back, Nelly. Make him forget," and I drew the door to behind me.

Bruce, as the King had said, was kicking idle heels in the great gilded hall, his hands driven deep down into his pockets, his fine wig a trifle awry. He jumped boyishly to his feet as I came out of the dining-room, kissed the hand I extended to him and held it still in his big, warm, friendly clasp. He looked

down at me from his towering height, his kind face all over smiles.

"Wonderful woman," he whispered to me, cocking an eye towards the lackeys opposite close to the front door. "'Twas the greatest success! His Majesty met the good Duke" (thus Bruce always spoke of Monmouth, whom he loved devotedly), "and they were friends again before Chiffinch could serve the supper. How did you win over the King? Once they met it was plain sailing; but till they met—! and the meeting is owing to you. Ah, his Grace knows, and he will wait on you on your return; he bade me tell you, did I see you before he could. But how, Madame, how wove you the spell?"

I glanced up at his excited face with a weary smile. "Why, truly, I know not. By loss, I think—loss of temper, my friend!—or by purchase; I went a-selling, or a-giving, perhaps. . . ." He looked mystified and I laughed outright at his mystification. Had I been younger, where would the puzzle have lain? What had I to barter when I dealt with a king?

"Nay, Bruce, my dear, we had no dealings, your master—our master—and I. Except that he gave me what I asked for. Now I'm for my bed. 'Tis a tiring world."

"Not when it goes as we wish, sure," he retorted laughing, taking my cloak from the servants and wrapping it carefully about my autumn-tinted draperies. I snapped my mask into place. "When you're my age, sir," I said with a smile, "you'll find you're most weary when you've just been given all you ask. Have I to see James this night, egad, and so late? Will he never have mercy on me?"

"What mercy do you require of him?" asked Bruce, putting aside Nelly's men and settling me in my chair himself with his old courtier-like deftness.

"That he should let me alone!" I cried, with a

sudden rush of pettishness, falling back among my cushions.

Lord Bruce kissed my hand once more and smiled down at me. "Ah, Madame, that would break your heart. But he will never break it thus, he loves you too well."

"James love me?" I cried. "Why, yes, he loves everybody, at one time or another. This is 'another,' Bruce! But I'm plaguy ungrateful; he doth love me a little or he would let me alone, I'll allow that. And we love him, don't we?" I looked at him hard through the black velvet of my vizard. "We love *them*, my friend?"

"Always," said Bruce. "*Always.*"

He bowed, backed, and my chair was carried away from the door.

Always? That was true. He never changed. Read his Memoirs, and see for yourself.

In these pages I too have set down, for my part, the single word Always against my love for James Scott—the love of a woman who was always in love with another man.

THE HATE OF THE DUCHESS OF MONMOUTH

CHAPTER XIX

THE HATE OF THE DUCHESS OF MONMOUTH

Did you know it, I could be
Only ready to implore you
That you'd deign to pardon me
All my pity for you!

M. N.

I COULD write much of the time which elapsed between this incident and the exposure of the Rye-house Plot, but there is little, public or private, which I have the heart to set down. The Stuart Fate had Monmouth in its grip. Every now and then he seemed on the verge of breaking free, but in my heart of hearts I knew there was no freedom for him—I was aware there was no hope, and yet I hoped! I saw the future towards which he was being steadily swept, and yet I tried to shut my eyes to it; I could not believe in him, and yet I did my best to believe. I suffered; but Heaven be my witness that I did not suffer alone.

How much Charles was hurt by Monmouth nobody knows; History, jeering again, calls his affection for his son senile, adduces his secret kindliness, while openly stern, as a proof of his incurable duplicity. I only guessed, but I guessed enough to know Charles was in torment. And yet he was aware, must have been aware, that he, like me, had to choose between Stuart and Scott, that James his brother or James his son was the rightful heir and must be treated as such—and he temporised, and played them off one

against the other, and, with incredible skill, like a juggler on a tight rope tossing a couple of balls, never let either drop nor lost his own balance. But the strain of it! I think it killed him. History again will tell you he died because of women. I think he died because of men. But I can never read his riddle. Why did he not throw all his weight on one side and have done with it? James of York, never popular, could have been sacrificed, banished abroad, pensioned off, if you will—his fate would hardly have been worse than it already was!—and he would have been spared much of what came after.

And Monmouth, proclaimed the heir, raised above that profligate wild Whig rabble that brought him to ruin, put, officially, into a high position of responsibility and trust, taught how to handle the reins of government, would have been another man. Oh! I have dreamt of it—Monmouth coming into his own in the open light of day, loved by the people, needing, as I honestly think, but a few more years of weight and balance to make him a fine soldier, a decently capable leader, a sufficiently firm ruler; for he was honest, he hated cruelty, he was more truly religious than most Stuarts, he was generous and kind—qualities conspicuous by their absence among the great men of the day. The English people worshipped him, and with them he was at his best; his was the sort of nature that shows at its worst in the face of opposition, dislike, and ill-luck, and expands like a sun-warmed flower in the glow of popularity. One sighs over the memory of the Progresses in the adoring West Country, the triumphs of "The Duking Days." He was in the prime of his glorious young manhood, his looks, his spirits, his fascination. He had inherited the fine health and clean blood of his grandfather Charles I, whose body when dissected after his martyrdom proved to be absolutely sound in every

respect. I do not think his sins affected him at all, his excesses slid off his constitution like dew from a leaf. I never remember him ill, I never saw him looking dissipated, and boyish as he was when I first met him, a boy he lay as if in a boy's sleep on his bier in the Bell Tower.

Age, thank Heaven, never came near him—he was spared that. And with that, much else that I can thank Heaven he never came to know.

But, because the King would not choose between them, or rather, chose first one and then the other, the country rocked dangerously with the swaying of the two great parties, and the condition of England was desperate indeed. Then, as a bolt from the blue to many of us, though not to me, came the bursting of the bubble of the Rye-house Plot, and Monmouth's flight (with those who could escape) with a price set on his head. I did not need to be told where he had gone; I smiled when I heard of busy search made for him here, there, and everywhere. I said "Toddington" to myself, and wished I had been living in the Watling Street to help him on his way, but I knew he would be safe with Henrietta. ("And if he and she between them can't keep the old lady quiet!" I added to myself grimly, "he'll never manage to be King of England.")

There came to me a messenger from my home towards the end of June 1683; one of my servants, it seemed, had met and recognised the fugitive close to St. Stephen's, indeed, Monmouth had so far trusted the man that he had bidden him go up to me at Whitehall and bring me a fragment of paper with just H.W. scrawled on it—he knew I should know. The fellow came, with some difficulty he penetrated the palace and was brought to my rooms; and I, after a few words of interrogation, made all sure, rewarded him handsomely, swore him to secrecy, and went to

Chiffinch's lodging to ask for an immediate audience of the King.

The Cabinet by the Water was engaged, His Majesty was close shut in with the Duchess of Monmouth—well, I must wait. Chiffinch looked at me very narrowly, and I smiled a little. "I think I shall please the King," I said. "I have news for him—but not for the Duchess. Let me wait here, Will, if I am not in the way."

So I sat by the window of the ante-room, the bit of paper folded closely in my hand. I had to wait long, voices came faintly through the door, sometimes there were silences; then, to my distress, there was a sudden exit, the Duchess, lost to all her usual calm, cold self-control, shaken with sobs, came violently out and turned blindly to me, fancying, I imagine, that I was Chiffinch, as I stood, a dark figure between her and the light; but in a moment she saw, and, if possible, the slowly growing hate which she had felt for years for me rose all the higher that I should see her tears. She made a magnificent effort, pulled herself together, and said in her accustomed chilly voice, "You, Madame Stuart? And while *we* are in trouble, what is *your* business here?"

If she had not been so angry—the revulsion of feeling at the sight of me—she would have been wiser.

"My business," I said quietly, "is the King's," and I closed my fingers more firmly on the scrap of writing. My heart, for all it was steeled against her, was yet softened by her obvious anxiety; but if I had dared to say, "James is safe, I know where he is!" the vials of her wrath and suspicion had been loosed upon me, I should have betrayed him, she would have guessed in a moment where he was, having (as I knew) a shrewd suspicion of the part I had played in connection with Henrietta already.

We faced each other. "Your Grace," I said softly, "these are hard times, we are all worn with apprehension, let us not make each other's burden heavier. We, I think, all care alike, our hearts incline in the same direction; may we not at least meet as friends and not add to the miseries of life by bitter speeches? Can I not help you?"

"You?" said the Duchess of Monmouth, with the edge of tempered steel in her voice, "you ask that of me? *You* help *me?* Heaven forgive you! Keep your help for those who ask for it."

Now she was very unhappy and I had been a fool. I ought to have remembered that I must seem in her eyes a bitter enemy, if only for my friendship for Lady Wentworth. (Yet Lady Wentworth made a decent respectable man of Monmouth, but could I expect his wife to be grateful?) She knew I hated his Whig associates; she knew I always tried to keep the peace between him and the King; she knew, or might have known, that I was to be trusted with any and every secret concerning him; and, because of just this other woman, she turned on me, white-faced, red-eyed, her fine gown disordered, her beautiful hair in confusion, the expression of that coldest and cruellest of all hate, the hate of the North, on her disfigured face. Nothing ever shook me; if I had been afraid of any woman it would have been of Monmouth's mistress, not his wife. I was sorry, deeply sorry, but —oh, it's hopeless! You help a man, and if you do it whole-heartedly, you make enemies of all the other women who care for him. At least I had found an ouspoken foe in one who, till now, had been outwardly friendly.

"Thank you for your advice," I said quickly. "I will keep my help for those who require it of me. I was pitying you, Madame, for your obvious trouble."

She turned on me; I had no idea that the self-

controlled, cynical woman, whom nothing seemed to disarm, could flare up like white fire as she did then.

"Pity me?" she hissed. "How *dare* ye?"

Yes, how dared I? I had not been sympathetic, I had been insulting. But it was not only I who was insulting at that interview. She moved towards the outer door, then turned, and looked me over.

"I hope you're well paid," she said in a deadly quiet voice. "There's a long list in his Grace's debt, and most of my fortune's gone to those ladies. So, Madame, I trust he does not forget what he owes you and that you get your money."

I went towards her where she stood at the door; I looked her in the eyes, steel as the sword that rang in her voice; unhappy she might be, suspicious of me she might be, but she was no fool, and she knew I loved her husband as an elder sister might have done; she knew how I worked for him; she knew better —indeed she knew better!—than to taunt me (for therein lay the sting) with being one of her husband's women, when I, for all the world to see, was too old and not sufficiently attractive.

She forgot for the moment, I think, that she was dealing with a Stuart.

"Madame," I said, "I am richly repaid. I have never had a penny of my lord Duke's, nor shall I ever. He has given me his friendship, his confidence, and his gratitude. I'm sorry your Grace is so poor."

There was an appalling silence; perhaps I had overstepped all bounds, but I had been severely tried. She ignored my last sentence.

"Do you know, Mistress," she said, in a voice that made every word hurt like a dagger, "what is the name for women whose day is past who help young libertines to their ladies' favours and gain thereby their 'friendship, confidence, and gratitude'? 'Tis not a pretty profession."

Now I had it straight!—this was her vengeance on me for befriending Henrietta Wentworth. We had dropped our masks indeed; I was so angry, and yet so immeasurably amused, that I simply burst out laughing.

"Oh, your Grace," I cried, "how strange you should say that to me! For give me leave to say that no woman has ever sent my lord Duke into the arms of others as effectually as you yourself," and I swung on my heel, with a perfectly brutal little half-curtsey, half flip of my skirts, went to the door of the King's cabinet, scratched thereon, as I had no real right to do, but it was part of my armour at that moment. Where Chiffinch was I cannot understand, nor could I then, why he left the Duchess and me alone then I am unable to explain; I wish he had not, but so it fell out.

A voice said "Enter." I turned the key and went straight in. The King sat in a great chair by the fireplace, shading his eyes with his hand.

Once in his presence, with the door closed behind me, the flood of my anger rushed back on my heart, leaving me speechless, helpless, near to the breaking point; only the sight of that weary, depressed figure, crumpled up in the chair like an old man, the dark, tired face half hidden, made me forget myself and all other women in the world. I went forward very quietly, I knelt down by his elbow, I laid one timid hand on his arm and with the other I spread on his knee the little paper with the initials H. W. scribbled on it.

"Charles," I said softly, in a whisper, "our boy has sent us this."

Ten minutes later, when Chiffinch scratched at the door and was admitted, he found the King and his

kinswoman seated one on each side of the cold hearth, two practical people who had been settling a small affair of business. He did not know that I had cried for five minutes, my head on Charles's hand outstretched on the arm of his chair, nor that my hair was bright with more than a few tears from those kind brown eyes that had looked down on me. Oh, we loved James—always, always! Had there been no other link between us, that alone would have riveted us fast! He was so dear to me, and his father, whom he forgot, whom he used so badly, against whose freedom (though never against whose life, as they swore) he plotted, loved him quite unalterably; nothing, in all Charles's life, ever caused his inner love for Monmouth to waver for an instant.

He was angry with him, and with reason; he publicly disgraced him; he kept up a semblance of stony wrath; he took part with others against him; he died, so the world thinks, without a word of forgiveness. *He never changed at all.* It was absolute devotion from start to finish. Monmouth did not realise it—I did.

And because I loved him too, yet because the King came first, it nearly broke my heart to see how Charles suffered. And I could do so little, for the King, fond of me, kind to me as he was, had no *love* to spare for such as I! Well, I could bring him news such as I did that day; I could bear his daughter-in-law's insolence and forget it in a moment; I could (and did) bear much more before I had done, and I saw Monmouth come to realise Henrietta's love, but never that of his father. Charles was both father and mother to Monmouth; he combined a woman's unswerving fidelity with an unreasoning and unreasonable indulgence that was kind only to be cruel, in result. But I think Charles asked but one thing of anybody: he asked of his son just the love he him-

self gave him—and he never had it. And he faced, in those last years of his, the fact that Monmouth loved him as in the old game, "Much, little, not at all." He faced the fact that Monmouth loved him because he was King, that Monmouth wanted not love of him, but the promise of a crown. And to this day I shall never understand how anybody failed to love Charles.

Yet, perhaps, after all I do understand. It was because they did not understand him.

"Sire," I said, "shall I go down to Toddington myself? If you will give me leave to retire to my home, then, after a little, I will make my way onward—I can do it unnoticed—and I can see him quite secretly, and tell him anything you will and bring back all news."

Charles shook his head. "Nay," he replied, "we know where he is—he'll be safe. While he is there, he'll be out of mischief, and, mark my words, he will find it very pleasant to be at peace. Madame Virgin, at peace!" said the tired voice, suddenly intense, suddenly strained with misery. "My dear—think of it. Young and handsome and in love for the first time, far away in the depths of the country with the woman he worships. Why, James is in Paradise—and I am in Purgatory." He looked at me. "You don't believe in Purgatory, eh? It's to be all Heaven for you or all Hell—hereafter. But meantime, my cousin, what do you make of this life? Neither Purgatory nor Paradise, neither Heaven nor Hell."

I looked at him with an aching heart. "Sire," I answered, "I think of it as—this life; that is what it is to me. And that's enough, too much, sometimes. If—I could find myself a Paradise like James, truly, it would be good. But oh, Charles, if I could find one for you . . . !"

He rose, and the old cynical expression came back to his face. "I'm happy enough," he said. "You need not distress yourself about me." He looked at his watch and round the room at the various other timepieces, all going, all quite independent of one another, and he seemed to be making a sort of half-smiling calculation.

"Well, I have an appointment with my lady Portsmouth. I go"—he looked at me—"to my Paradise," and he walked with me to the door. I cannot describe it; for that one moment there swam over me a black sea of despair that was not jealousy, for had he found real happiness with Louise Portsmouth I could have sped him on his way to her with a light and grateful heart. He saw my face as I opened the door for him. He took hold of the ruffle of my sleeve and held me back.

"Remember," he said softly, "we can't do everything for everybody! We, you and I, have done a good deal for James; we have helped him, largely helped him, to his Paradise, I think. And I've tried to find one for you, Charlotte, but somehow"—he shrugged his shoulders—"you're one of those confounded women who are nuns by nature!"

I twisted round and looked hard up at him. "So you don't know me at all after all these years," I cried. "I am no nun, I never was, I have told you so often. But there's nothing, nobody in life that I find can make a Paradise for me, Sire." (Charles looked at me, as hard, as straight as I at him.) "There's only one man, and he has never thought of me in that way, thank Heaven!" I said.

We still stood, gazing at each other without flinching. "For I could never have made a Paradise for him, and, Sire, that is why there isn't one for me, for it takes two to make it—like a quarrel."

"He's a fool," said my King, and laughed, a little

dry laugh that had no mirth in it, and nodded as he went out. "But I wonder," he added slowly, as he passed into the corridor—"I wonder if *I* had not had a jewel in my hand all these years—and have just played marbles with it."

EDEN

CHAPTER XX

EDEN

With joy we do leave thee,
False world, and do forgive
All thy base treachery,
For now we'll happy live!
We'll to our bow'rs,
And there spend our hours;
Happy there we will be,
We no strife there can see,
No quarrelling for crowns,
Nor fear the great ones' frowns,
No slavery of State,
No changes in our fate.
From plots this place is free,
Here we'll happy be!
We'll sit and bless our stars,
That from the noise of wars,
Did us Toddington give,
That thus we happy live.

THE DUKE OF MONMOUTH.[1]

FOR all he would not let me go to Toddington when Monmouth first fled there, a couple of months later Charles seemed to be anxious to have more news of his son, albeit he never said so. But I watched him, and I saw. Had I asked permission again, he, man-like, would probably have dismissed me once more with a hasty, "Pish, stay where you are! Are you sick of Whitehall, then?" So, woman-like, it behoved me to gang warily. Then I found he too was watching me. When a man means a woman to speak first, and is quite sure she is bound to do so,

[1] Written at Toddington Place, summer of 1683. From his pocket-book in the British Museum.

given rope enough, nothing is more amazing than her persistent silence. I did not mean to anger the King, but I was determined he should propose to me what I would not again suggest. So there was a little silent struggle between us!

Then came a day when the Court had a new jest; it was reported Monmouth had wearied of Toddington and had left it, carrying off Henrietta. Old Lady Wentworth was vowing vengeance and stirring up all the countryside, so said Rumour. Irritating whispers, irritating laughs sounded in corners. Charles, whose temper had worn thin for once, sat in the middle of it all, watched without seeming to watch, listened without appearing to listen, and said nothing in public. But that night I met him in the ante-room of the Queen's chamber. I had been superintending the arrangement of some of my lace-work upon a gown which the sewing-maids were refurbishing; I had been in attendance in her bedroom and was now dismissed. The King, looking rather like a large black thunder-cloud, nearly collided with me at the door.

Seeing who it was he closed both the entrances into her room and that leading out of the ante-chamber—had it not been done by the King I should have said the shutting of those doors came perilously near to slamming!—and suddenly turned on me with what I will frankly confess was a perfectly shattering oath!

"—— all women!" said Charles. "I should like to throw them into the Thames."

"Yes, Sire," I replied meekly, casting down my eyes in feigned alarm. "All of us? Do not begin with me."

Charles laughed, a ray of sunlight streaming through the blackness of the thunder-cloud. "Oh, you!" he said, in a tone which his hearer could and

did construe as she pleased. "I meant those giddy fools to-night. Pit-wish, pit-wish," he imitated the noise of whispering. "Of course it's James, and of course they're off on the wrong tack. Left his sanctuary, hath he? Likely!"

I waited in silence.

"*Well?*" said Charles with a suddenness that would have made me jump once. "*Well?* You hold your tongue and look down your nose till I could slap your face. Why can't you speak?"

"But I can, Sire!" I replied with a little ripple of amusement, "only I was wondering which would annoy you most, speech or silence. And if you slap me, Charles, I shall neither talk nor hold my peace, I shall burst into tears!"

"'Oh ye seas and floods,'" said His Majesty irreverently, with a little petulant laugh that reminded me of his son, giving a vicious pull to the long curl that hung over the shoulder next to him. "What's your opinion, now? Out with it. Is he there still, or is he off on some hare-brained chase that will land his neck in the noose? He forgets there is a price on his head and a warrant out for his arrest! He believes I can save him whatever he doth. I cannot, and if I could I would not. If he goes gallopading all over England he may hang, and I be rid of the worst of all my troubles. You laugh? It's no laughing matter. I am serious, woman!"

"I know," I retorted, trying to keep a straight face. "That is what makes it so amusing. You are never going to be disturbed by the idle cackling of that flock of geese yonder? If they say James is not there, why, you may be sure he is. But how can we find out for certain?" and I pretended to think, and suddenly caught a wicked black eye fixed on my mimic frown.

"Be damned to you!" remarked my cousin,

shaking all over. "You're set on forcing me to ask you to go and see. Well, I've cursed you till all's blue, and you ought to be swooning on the floor. But you're no fine lady, thank the gods. Have your way; I do ask you. Go to your St. Albans for a week, ride over to Toddington, see James and that pretty girl of his (aye, she's pretty, though the world would tell you she's not to my taste), and bring me back news of him. How he is, my dear, how he looks, how——" The softened voice suddenly hardened again, the sentence closed with another expletive, "—— him, the young viper!' '

I curtsied. "Sire, having said enough to reduce us all to ashes, your orders shall be obeyed. I will go; James shall send you a full report of himself and his doings. He'll be glad to see me, the bearer of such messages!"

The black eyes shone like polished jet.

"Aye, pussy, tell him verbatim what I have said, don't leave out a single world! James will recognise then the authentic ring of my remarks. I'll have you conveyed down to Hertfordshire in a private coach. Lie you quietly at home for some days and then go over to Toddington unnoticed if you can. I do not want to have these babblers giving tongue over your absence. I'll let them know you're—h'm—elsewhere."

"Anywhere, Charles," I said demurely, "so long as you can think of somewhere respectable."

I kissed his hand. "That," said Charles, "is quite beyond me."

Toddington Place in August! In this life I have walked its barren woods in iron-grey December, when the dry reeds flared red along the white water, and Monmouth's oak tossed skeleton branches to an empty sky. In that incarnation I sat one hot afternoon on

the edge of the great pond, whence there came the drowsy scent of a thousand water-lilies, and the sunlight filtered through the thick foliage overhead and danced in gold on the hair of three happy people under a tree.

My riding-hat lay on the skirts of my sober dark green habit, my vizard, whip, and gauntlets lay beside it; Lady Wentworth, a perfectly charming figure in a fine white holland gown and a wide-leafed straw hat, her fair hair, released from the stiff Court dressing, streaming down her back to the grass on which she sat, was next to me; and Monmouth, like a young god in disguise, in a peasant's suit of brown stuff, a coarse shirt and grey woollen hose, lace-less, jewel-less, his own hair curling about his sunburnt neck, lay on the short turf at our feet. We smiled down at him.

"Once again the Principal Shepherd, eh, Jupiter?" I laughed to Henrietta, our thoughts flying back to the Masque of Calisto. "Jamesy, you look positively bucolic. You will soon be getting fat! At least the country agrees with you."

"Why does anybody ever live in the town?" asked Jamesy lazily, biting a long stem of grass between his white teeth, and looking from one to the other. "I vow the country is Heaven. I never was there before," he added reflectively. Henrietta and I glanced at each other and laughed aloud. Monmouth was no whit put out.

"Look," he said, waving an appreciative arm round the vista of emerald trees and sapphire waters. "Look, saw you ever the like? And you live by choice looking out of brown windows on your grey old Thames!" (My hat was swept a yard away from my lap by this imperious gesture.)

"James hath discovered the country, I see," I remarked to Henrietta. "Oh, he makes the most

famous discoveries. No one had ever noticed it else! Now, not long ago he came and told me he had found out Love—*Love!* and none of us had ever heard of such a thing."

Monmouth smiled with us. "These Court wits," he said to Henrietta. "Bah! What do they know? They come down to Paradise—or should it be *up?*—holding their long skirts in one hand and a quizzing-glass in the other. 'Stab me, a buttercup!' " he said in a mincing voice, and we all went off into childish giggles.

"Ah, you may laugh," he said, "but I have the laugh of you all. There's no place like this. *I* have said it."

"He hath not only said it, he hath set it in verse," said Lady Wentworth, looking down at him with the soft light in her long dark eyes. "Read Madame your poems."

"James a poet?" I cried. "Why, that's news indeed. Will you bring out a volume to eclipse my poor Lord Rochester's?"

"Rochester?" said Monmouth, wrinkling up his straight nose in disgust. "That garbage! Not but what he could write a sweet enough love-song if only he could have remembered not to dip his pen in filth." (I suppressed a smile; this virtuous attitude towards John Wilmot's verse was startlingly new.) Out of a brown pocket came a brown pocket-book—the new singer needed no pressing. He cleared his throat commandingly, and began:

"Oh how blest and how innocent
  And happy is a country life!
Free from all turmoil and discontent,
  Here is no flattery or strife;
For 'twas the first and happiest life
  When first man did enjoy himself."

Unfortunately he looked up and caught my eye.

I am tender towards the youthful aspirant to poetical honours as a general rule; on this occasion no power on earth could keep me solemn. Monmouth's face as I broke down in the effort was the last straw. "Oh, James!" I cried, wiping my eyes, "*what is* that?"

"That," he replied, not in the least annoyed, "is the first verse of my first poem. I dare swear Master Dryden himself made no better beginning. What's wrong, Madame?"

"I don't know," I said weakly, as he and Henrietta both laughed. "Unless you meant 'himself' to rhyme with 'innocent' and 'discontent.' Did you?"

"Not I!" answered Monmouth, in a lordly manner. "That line hath no rhyme. It waves a leg, see you, as if it were dancing a contre-danse. 'Tis the spirit of the thing you should admire, cousin, the fine rustic tone counts for most, the Garden of Eden air."

"Bravo!" I applauded. "You wax lyrical in prose at any rate. The Garden of Eden—yes. Very fine. Where is the serpent?" and I looked about me.

"Here!" said the young Duke mischievously, patting my hand.

I laughed afresh. "Thank you, my dear lord. It is true you've discovered Love and the Country and Poesy and the Garden of Eden—how much is there left for you to find out?"

"Nothing more that counts, my dear," he said, with one of his charming smiles at Henrietta. "I know everything now."

I think of that smile and that speech sometimes, and wrench my thoughts away from that awful period of further discovery that he had to pass through, when he met for the first time the fear of Life and the fear of Death—yes, and "the fear of Love"—and all that they could teach, and then Death itself, and learnt the great last lesson of all. Then, I remember, I

shivered as he spoke, and Lady Wentworth glanced swiftly at my face out of the long eyes that had watched for so many years and saw so much always. I pulled myself together, and smiled afresh.

"Why, there's always something to learn, even at Court," I said maliciously. "Had I known the joys of rural existence were a sealed book to you, we could have given you instruction at St. Stephen's. You might have leant over my pig-sty walls with a straw in your mouth, poking fat pigs with your stick. But doubtless I should have failed to convince you that a pig-sty was preferable to Whitehall."

"Now that," said Monmouth, "is meant to be witty, and is merely rude. Take back this message to my father: 'Madame Stuart leaves your sty and comes to poke me in mine with a stick. She agrees that it is Paradise.' "

I pulled his hair. " 'Tis a happiness to be able to pull hair that hurts," I interpolated. "All those fine curls you used to wear gave one no better sport than coming out if one were rough. I'll tell His Majesty: aye, I've much to tell him. But what I cannot repeat is what he bade me tell you!"

"As bad as that?" asked Henrietta seriously, to Monmouth's delight.

"Worse," I said. "*Much!*"

The golden sunshine slanted lower, a kingfisher, a streak of living turquoise light, flashed across the water. I sighed, rose, and shook the grass from my habit, replaced my hat on my grey locks, and said, "I must linger no more. I have far to go, and your upland roads are none too smooth. Besides, my poor nag will be weary of waiting tied to that tree."

We walked together towards the farther gate of the park—I had avoided the main entrance and had gone beyond it to the upper wicket leading into the woods above the fishponds.

"Ah, my dears, I would I could stay, but you are better here in your Eden without the serpent." I laid a hand on hers and his. "My dears," I said again, and Monmouth freed my horse and put me up. "So I leave you, and go back to my sty."

I rode down the long Watling Street home. "Eden?" I said to myself, with a little ache at my heart, "a green garden with one other—the one other only out of all the world." I thought of my own life, shook my head, and set my face with a smile towards home and London lying beyond it. Before my inward vision rose the great Banqueting Hall, the gold and colour, the light and sweet sound. I saw the shimmer of the polished floor and heard the wail of the violins, as a tall figure, moving out from among the crowd into the dance, swam into my ken, the dark face lit with the amazingly transfiguring smile, the white teeth and black eyes shining.

Whitehall, my sty, to which I was going back!

MY LAST INTERVIEW WITH KING CHARLES

CHAPTER XXI

MY LAST INTERVIEW WITH KING CHARLES

You gave me my life, all my life for those years. Oh, yes, you did!
M. N.

With that visit to Toddington ended our light-hearted gaiety at Court, and the old life of alternate sun and shadow seemed plunged for good and all into darkness which might be felt.

I do not quite know how I got through the period in the autumn of 1683, when Monmouth, after the dreadful business of being restored to favour and losing in a day or two all the ground he had gained, left the palace, and, shortly after, England, for the last time during Charles's lifetime—except for the secret visit in November 1684. "Fini de rire!"—and we laughed no more.

For a while Charles confided in no one, and those of us left who loved Monmouth, Bruce among them, knew not how to bear it. Bruce came to see me one afternoon and found me looking out at a dreary expanse of grey river-water. We tried to talk on usual subjects, but it was useless. He suddenly choked and broke down, laying his head on the table on his folded arms, and crying quite openly. I could not cry. I just sat still and looked out of the window. At last I said, "My friend, this is tearing us in pieces. You and I, who are the King's friends and James's friends, know how the King loves him still, but how all his future depends on His Majesty. He is safe, in

Holland, with—with——" I broke off. I had forgotten, for the moment only, how deeply Bruce had loved Henrietta Wentworth. Because he had never changed towards Monmouth I had forgotten it—for the moment only. I could think of nothing but Charles, and Monmouth's future, and wonder what life held for us all. It was as well I did not know. When Charles died, Bruce has set down in his Memoirs that then died all happiness at Court for him; and if for him, what not for me? But I was to do one more service yet.

A few weeks went by. One day I had a long talk with Will Chiffinch, that strange creature, always, for all his faults, linked to me by his faithful devotion to his King; and he let fall a hint or two that Charles and Monmouth were in correspondence, that all was not as bad as it seemed, that he believed His Majesty kept up an appearance of anger against his Grace, but—"but watch his face, Madame," he concluded to me. "Have you thought of late that His Majesty seems so sad? Ill? We all know he is in bad health; he is more unwell than they"—he swept a hand round with a sort of gesture that included the unthinking Court crowd—"than they notice. But I believe he is more cheerful. You will be at the ball to-night, Madame? Why, then, put on your prettiest gown and be gay! You will find a change; I think you will remark it." And I thanked him and went back to my rooms, lighter at heart.

I did as he suggested; I put on my prettiest dress, a dull greyish-pink satin like a faded red rose, with a lace petticoat, embroidered and fringed with silver, silver-embroidered gloves, claret-hued stockings, and a big claret and silver fan, and went to dance my last dance, had I known it, at Whitehall. We had one of Monmouth's favourite bransles, and I felt more like crying than laughing, but of course I wore a

smiling face, and talked nonsense, and made jests. I remembered my partner was a Dutch gentleman, whose name I hardly grasped, or forgot, a friend of Harry Sidney's, and who had been not long before in Holland, though I did not find this out at first, or I might (in the excitement of the moment) have plied him with indiscreet questions about Monmouth. But as we were promenading round the hall after the dance, the King himself passed us with several gentlemen—Henry Savile among them, and I think, Sydney Godolphin—and paused on seeing us. He made a sign to my partner that he wished to speak to him, and I curtsied and drew back, of course; but after a word or two to him His Majesty made a little signal, barely more than the lift of an eyebrow, to me, and I came forward again. The crowd was all round us, but Charles smiled at me, and remarked, "Your pardon, cousin, I will restore you your partner now, but I may need your company to-morrow, Chiffinch shall inform you. In the meantime"—he dropped his usually resonant deep voice—"be happy."

"Do I look sad, Sire?" I asked, a trifle piqued, as I had been acting my hardest all the evening, and thought I had succeeded well.

"I said, 'be happy,' " answered Charles, "as well as look it! To-morrow you shall say good-bye to all us dull fellows," and he smiled again and moved away, while my heart gave a great leap and then stood still. "Good-bye"? Was I, too——? What should I hear on the morrow?

"Ah, Madame," put in my partner, "when you leave Whitehall you must travel. There are countries —and people—who would welcome you." I recollect the immense effort I made to pull myself together, for I knew something lay behind all this. I made the obvious retort, but I was on my guard. I laughed, I danced all night. I was near the great door when

the King withdrew, our eyes met with understanding; he bowed right and left, and I, recovering from my deepest obeisance, sinking and rising amid the billows of my old rose satin and silver, looked round the great saloon, and said, in my heart: "Good-bye? *Is* it good-bye?"

Next morning there was a scratch at the door of my ante-room while I was still in my undress, my woman came back to me saying Chiffinch was without, and would I present myself at the Cabinet by the Water in an hour's time? I dressed quickly, put on a quiet gown and a big disguising scarf of striped gauze and silk, half hiding my face, and hurried to those familiar apartments, not so very far from my own, overlooking the river, where the King had his most private interviews, and transacted more business than the present world is aware of! Chiffinch admitted me, his sharp features white and thin between the curls of his big black perriwig, his bright eyes fixed on me, though he said nothing. I looked a question at him, but he made no reply—he simply turned and conducted me to the Cabinet by the Water, announced me, and went, and I was alone with the King.

He was standing by the fire with his elbow on the mantelpiece—the spring day was chilly, but the Thames sparkled with primrose sushine, rolling white clouds hurried across a clear blue sky. Charles was in a simple suit of iron-grey cloth faced with black silk, his Garter star alone giving brightness, his Garter ribbon, colour.

"I have sent for you because I want to send you away," he said to me, coming forward and taking my hand. I forgot all ceremony, all my manners! I only stood still and looked at him, and felt my very lips growing white.

"Send me away—from *you?*"

"Why, yes." He laughed at my frightened face. "Banishment in disgrace! Nay, you need not be afraid! What would you say to travelling a little, to seeing another country, at my bidding? Would you do it? Will you go to Holland, to James, will you look after him, pranking at that Puritan Court, as you have always done, and care for my interests, as you have always done too? I can think of no one better; I want somebody who will live quietly there for a while, a friend of his, a friend of mine, for we are friends again, he and I—ah, you guessed?—I could not tell you before," he added, almost apologetically, a rare thing for him.

"Why should you tell me?" I said. "I was breaking my heart over you both, but I hoped for the best with James, and I—I always trusted you, Sire."

"Trusted me?" he echoed. "Now who has ever done that before? What a silly thing to do!"

"Was it so silly, Sire? Have you ever failed me?"

"Come to think of it," said Charles, "have I? I believe not. But you're the only woman in Whitehall who would say so!"

"Ah, Sire," I said, "but they don't know you as I do."

"No, they don't," he answered, "and that's a fact; not the man *you* know."

"Nor the King I know," I added firmly.

He gave me the swift glance under his lashes that so reminded me of Monmouth. "Perhaps not. You're a good woman, and you've never asked me for anything, and why should I have deceived you? Besides, I always liked you!" he concluded, half to himself, in that funny way he had, and I burst out laughing.

"Oh, how dull that sounds," I cried, keeping

my mirth natural only by an immense effort. "*How* dull!"

But he heard the tension in my voice, he understood the strain I was going through, and, to help me, he went on with our jesting, though his next remark had the opposite result from what he intended.

"Ah!" he remarked, with a little mischievous smile and a wholly French gesture of the fine hand. "Remember, I am sending you to the man you love; the man you have loved all along, as I know."

At that brief sentence the mask I had worn for a decade was swept suddenly from my face, and speech came against my will. My eyes were raised to his very slowly, and as slowly let fall.

"You do *not* know," I whispered. . . .

In the silence that ensued I never felt my heart beat at all. The King's face completely changed.

"Charlotte," said the man I had loved all along, "*I think I do.* Look at me."

I obeyed; he met my eyes with a totally new expression in his own, quite unmistakable. Charles, my beloved, my master, that one look has made worth while all the endless years, since that April morning, that I have had to live without you!

"You see I know," he said very quietly. "I have always known."

There was nothing more for either of us to say.

He walked to the great window and looked out on the broad flood that swept irresistibly past the Palace of Whitehall and all it stood for. I remained standing rigid in the middle of the room and watched him as he went from me, and as he stood there, and as he turned once more towards me, a sable silhouette against the silver-gold of the outer light. But it was not he who broke the silence—it was I.

"So I go, Sire?" I said, and picked up the broken thread of our discourse, knotted it deftly as a woman can, and the subject went forward as if it had never been dropped. "To Holland, then; to James, and—when?"

"Can you be ready by to-night?" he asked simply.

I caught my breath. I thought I was prepared for everything, but not for seeing him no more before I left him. . . .

"To-night? You send me so soon?"

"I send you now, if you will go. It is not a command, it is a favour I ask of you," 'with the smile that had won him his chequered way through the world.'

"Ah, I know it," I murmured shakily; then, snatching at my usual gay demeanour, "I'll go in an hour!"

"The packet doth not sail till to-morrow morning; but go, if you will, this minute!" and we both laughed, and as suddenly we became silent. "Listen," he said in a business-like tone, "this is what I want of you. Sit here, and I will tell you," and I seated myself in a high-backed chair by the table, while he took another. "These are your instructions," and for ten minutes or so he spoke of what part I was to play, the exile following Monmouth into Holland, leading the simplest, most unostentatious life, yet not entirely secret, seeing the world out there, yet not of it, playing, in fact, much the same part I had played at Whitehall, but *now* taking a real hand in the political game, sending back information—he gave me the key to the cypher, and told me half a dozen other devices I was to employ, while awating his orders—a "go-between," plying 'twixt him and his beloved prodigal at the Court of his nephew and niece.

"My nephew—my good nephew," said Charles, with

a little grimace; "if he lives, he will upset Europe—after I am dead."

"Don't speak of your death!" I said quickly, with a sharp intake of my breath.

> "Let Cæsar live long, let Cæsar live long,
> For ever be happy and ever be young."

"Yes, my dear," said Charles, leaning across the corner of the table and once more looking me very straight between the eyes, "I know all that. But Cæsar is not young any longer, and has he ever been happy, do you think?"

"No, Sire," I replied quietly. "I do not think he ever has. Are Stuarts ever happy? Not the Stuarts that I know. But if I can make you any happier, why, I'll go to James."

"*He's* happy now," said Charles, "and he doth not know it," and there fell another sudden silence between us. I rose and took up the papers he had given me, put them into the front of my gown, and said in an expressionless voice:

"To-night I will be ready, then. I have not much to do, only a few small affairs to put in order. And I will say good-bye to no one."

"Not even to me," he said lightly, rising too. "No, not good-bye."

"Nay," I persisted, "for you must let me come back before long."

"You shall come back," was the answer; "it is only good-bye till we meet again. Don't shiver!—you are going to see that bad boy of mine, whose silly head hath been turned. Turn it round again the right way, will you? I do not want him to lose it altogether," and he smiled and took both my hands, and at that moment my heart sank—sank like a stone—and I felt cold, the horrible chill of approaching calamity. A voice said in my ears like an echo,

"I do not want him to lose it altogether." . . . "It is only good-bye till we meet again" . . . and the glimmer of spring sunshine on the water swayed suddenly, and went round with me. I could not say a word, I could only smile speechlessly; the King, smiling, kissed my hands, both together. I curtsied, wondering, as I swept down in the deep swooning movement, if I should ever have strength to rise again, rose, and turned blindly to the door, groping for a latch I could not see. Charles was beside me, his hand found it.

"My dear, dear cousin!" he said.

He put his arms round me and kissed me full on the lips for the first and last time; the door closed behind me, and I was in the ante-room looking at Chiffinch as if he were a stranger.

"Not to lose his head altogether. . . . It is only good-bye till we meet again. . . . My dear, dear cousin. . . ."

And that was the last time on earth I saw King Charles.

"Take care of him, Will Chiffinch," I said, I hardly knew why, standing in my own little room to which the Keeper of the King's Closet had escorted me.

"Aye, Madame," he returned—he seemed to understand, somehow, "I will do all I can. I would give my life for him, you know that. But his world has gone awry."

Ah, I knew it had. I could but do his bidding. He had set me a task, I would carry it out, and maybe all would go well, and Monmouth be restored to favour, and Whitehall be gay again, and I back in my little rooms—the little rooms I had not yet left! I looked round them, as if they were as strange to me as Chiffinch had been.

"I am to conduct you to the packet and see you safely on board. I have all ready, Madame; you have but to consider your travelling gear. Everything is planned, your journey is arranged, and a couple of gentlemen to attend you. You need think of nothing; you will want for nothing."

I still felt dazed. "Was it all settled upon before the King asked me to go?" I said stupidly.

"Yes, Madame," answered Chiffinch, "to the last detail!"

"Why, was His Majesty so sure of me?" I asked, almost like a child.

Will Chiffinch's sharp dark features lit with a rare smile. "Sure of you?" he exclaimed; "when was His Majesty not sure of you?"

Charles, that was something for me to remember, and I shall remember it for ever.

And, my love who was never my lover, you and I only out of all our world knew my secret. Monmouth had not the vaguest suspicion that it was you who had my heart, nor had Lady Wentworth; there was not a friend (or an enemy) of yours or mine who guessed, nay, not even Sophia Carey, to whom the rest of my life was an open book.

I loved you without return, but let no one say that I loved "in vain," for it was a thing apart from that Great Reality, our amazing friendship from beginning to end. *That* was never influenced in the slightest degree by my love for you or your lack of love for me, thus I think I may claim for myself that in one way only I was an exceptional woman.

As for you, Charles, I never met another man in the very least like you!

So at your bidding I came to live in your palace; so at your bidding I went away. That night I left

Whitehall and set my face towards the open sea, and as our barge moved off down the river I looked but once behind me. "Good-bye," I said under my breath. "Good-bye. But I shall come back."

Yes, I came back, but the next time I entered Whitehall King James II was on the throne, King Monmouth was lying dead in the Bell Tower, and King Charles was under the stone in Henry VII's Chapel.

My world had gone awry with me too, never to be straightened again.

GOD SAVE THE KING!

CHAPTER XXII

GOD SAVE THE KING!

Through the long blue plain the wind is calling,
  Calling, calling, calling down the day;
From a silver sky the night is falling,
  As the cloak of Death o'er quiet clay.
Kings may die—but never dies the calling,
  Calling to our King away!

Wind, be still, be still and cease your crying,
  Aching heart, what boots it that you ache?
Death is not for those who crave for dying,
  Though it be for a dead Stuart's sake.
What is love to one in silence lying?
  One who sleeps and will not wake.

M. N.

HERE follows a strange chapter in my life.

Looking back, it is easy to see how I was caught for good—or for evil—in the web of Stuart misfortune, from which only the triple tragedy that followed was to loose me.

When I arrived in Holland I found Monmouth the spoiled darling of William's Court, and, as you know, Madame Carey, allowed to flirt and dance and skate with the Princess; Henrietta was "recognised" (she and her mother had been sent for by Monmouth from England as soon as he left for good, and settled abroad); and there were of course many other exiled English—discontented Whigs chiefly. Later, I was to wish with all my heart there had not been! I have been re-reading some old French correspondence on the subject lately, and it all comes back to me, how William indulged Monmouth as much as Charles had

done, gave him the run of his private apartments as he did nobody but Bentinck his lifelong friend, encouraged him to play (there is no other word for it!) with his pretty young wife; for Mary, though married for years, was still in her early twenties, as she was only born a few months before Monmouth's marriage at fourteen; and, in fact, Henrietta and I saw his head turned more completely than it had been at Whitehall! Philadelphia was overflowing with ambition, but was terrified of William and rather afraid of Monmouth! and she had the sense to be quiet; Henrietta was also ambitious, and, unlike me, not convinced (Anna and I were alike *there!*) that all Monmouth's future depended on Charles. She had never really liked the King, and resented his treatment of Monmouth; I always adored him, and knew he had let his son off only too lightly! We both together feared his associates—and fellow-exiles—we both foresaw their influence and where they would lead him, and, even though Charles was supposed to be better in health, we both knew we were living under the edge of a cloud that would shortly spread over all our sky.

Also, though William was polite, I never felt sure whether he did not know precisely what my position in the town was, and my reasons, apart from my fondness for Monmouth and Lady Wentworth, for living there. She, at the bottom of her heart, chafed at her own situation, which, though apparently overlooked entirely by the Prince and Princess, brought her—rightly of course, one knows—much humiliation at times. She was quite certain of her lover, though, and he never showed the slightest wavering in his fidelity to her; his flirtations with Mary we all understood, and all enjoyed, even William!—but there, too, William was to have the laugh of us all later on.

HENRIETTA LADY WENTWORTH.

Charles knew; I dared not think of what I guessed was the truth of it all; Monmouth never understood. He was the popular young prince who sought to make everybody love him as usual, and succeeded beyond all his own expectations! he felt himself so favoured and safe that he could rashly worry Bentinck and infuriate d'Avaux, who, be sure, kept Louis XIV posted, as we know, and he would listen to Henrietta's beseechings and my advice, and laugh at our fears, and politely disbelieve our facts.

He cared not a straw for Philadelphia, who alarmed everybody as a rule, he worshipped Henrietta, but he swayed her, not she him, and he was as wax in the hands of the Fates who drew him on to his tragedy, and the men who artfully ministered to his Royal ambitions. Even Charles had never been able to check that. He had in his possession one of those proofs that just fail to prove his mother's marriage, "the wish was father to the thought;" he was amazingly popular, and he fancied he could do everything with that popularity, especially in the face of his uncle's religion.

He loved Charles in a way—only in a way, alas! and it is perfectly certain he was laying all his plans and expecting his father's death. I was dreading it, trying not to think of it, hoping and hoping to be recalled to England and Whitehall, much as I loved my life of travel that had ended at The Hague, amusing and interesting as it all was—but a dance under the smoke-pall on a volcano's crust, as I knew, and, as I think, Henrietta guessed.

I was often with her—or rather, she frequently came to my modest lodgings—but perhaps the strangest part of our intimacy was the way in which we never spoke of our deepest feelings at that time, except our mutual love for Monmouth. We lived for the day, as I know now, and we took things as they came.

Now and then I went to one of the more private balls William gave for Monmouth, and never have I seen any man shine in society as James did. He was the finished courtier, the gracious great gentleman to the life, with more than a touch of the Stuart fascination, the Stuart authority. There was a quaint likeness between himself and the Princess, a certain simplicity about them both as well as a physical resemblance.

Mary was quite slim then, very tall, with dark brown hair shot with auburn, so near the Duke's colouring; in features much like her father (and, in a way, Monmouth) as a young man. A delightful creature altogether, Mary: a truly good woman, an admirable wife, and, in those days, by no means altogether the crushed butterfly some writers make her out. No Stuart was ever quite crushable!—at any rate, when young.

She had been little at Court before her marriage in 1677, but we knew one another fairly well, and it is to be admitted she sought me out almost oftener than I had bargained for when I went to Holland, and loved to hear me talk of Whitehall.

She worshipped William, and was devoutly loved by her people, but—Whitehall had been Whitehall! even to the girl of fifteen. Monmouth simply brought it with him; there again was a renewed attraction. She never wavered in her love for her husband, that I will swear, but she was without any doubt so fond of her kinsman that when the cloud grew and blotted out all that too short spell of gaiety and youth, Mary lost something which she never got back. It killed Henrietta, it ended all my real life, it took Monmouth over the inevitable, inescapable precipice, but for a little while, from about June 1684 till the beginning of 1685, we were all happy together out there. Monmouth and Henrietta went over—secretly, of course—to see Charles, as is told in the pocket-book, ("The

way that I took when I went for England"), in the November, and all was forgiven, and they were both to return to Whitehall very shortly—they came back radiant from their secret journey!—when the blow fell, and "all was in the dust." But that was not till the February.

Monmouth was untiring.

If he was not driving a traineau on the ice, as he used to do for Mary of Modena with a horse which only he and his father could manage, he was skating—of course he learnt in half a day, though Mary took much longer!—or practising every new dance-step he could get hold of—there she was nearly as quick as he—or hunting with William, or making love to all the stolid stout Dutch ladies till they did not know if they were standing on their heads or their heels! or setting some new mode in dress (he it was who brought in the three-cornered hat we usually associate with William, in which he looked irresistible), or singing some new song to Henrietta's playing—she was very musical, and used to fall into fits of helpless mirth over him, as he had a charming voice, a good ear, the ear of a perfect dancer, but no earthly musical talent. His life was a whirl, as usual, and yet with it all he found time to spend many happy hours in her company, and often he came to my discreet rooms —I had a most convenient back door in a bye-street —and met her there, and the Princess would sometimes appear without warning, attended by just one lady, Mrs. Trelawney, typically Whitehall to the end of her Dutch career, or even only a waiting-woman, who would sit and gossip happily below-stairs with my faithful maid.

You can see, I think, the old Dutch rooms, panelled with dark shining wood, their polished brasses and Dutch crockery, bowls and pots of bulbs, chequered cotton-cushioned chairs, homely comfort and cleanli-

ness, typical of the thrifty trim ways of that fair city, with its towering churches, its red roofs, its tree-set canals, its woods, its broad open squares. I loved Holland in a way; but there was never a mountain—it was all flat, flat, flat—and I come from the hills! Still, Monmouth was Dutch-born, and Mary was Dutch-wed, and Philadelphia was a naturalised Englishwoman only, and had many Dutch relations, so we did not feel strangers in that kindly land. I wrote my long secret despatches to Charles and sent them in many strange ways, and he sent, as is well known, letters to his son, sometimes unkind, sometimes relenting, but only those sealed with the small diamond-set seal were to be taken as real. Now and then he wrote to me, but very seldom—he generally sent me a message I could understand in Monmouth's letters; Monmouth could not always see its drift!—and so the days went by, and I sat in the wide window, and wrote, or worked, or thought, and *ached* for Whitehall, and our James to be in power again, and for the old days that were gone for ever.

I remembered Princess Mary's tears on quitting England: "Madame, you were coming to Whitehall, but I am leaving it!" and once I reminded her of that phrase when she had come on foot and with but one waiting-woman, and she and I were sitting in the cosy brown room with its dark pictures and its gleaming brass. Mary's auburn curls were heaped high on her graceful head, and her long short-sighted eyes narrowed and widened as she talked, easily filling with tears, easily sparkling as her father's never did, very cautious in some directions with me (there I saw William's warning!), very free in others, since I too was of her blood, and deep down in our hearts we were exiles together, as Stuarts who go on their travels, and those who go on their travels for Stuarts' sake, must always be!

I can see her leaning back in her chair, with a fleeting likeness to Charles, her beautiful chestnut-brown velvet hood and cloak, lined and trimmed with ruddy brown squirrel fur loosened in the warmth of the room, her plain but pretty winter gown of a paler shade of chestnut, with its fine lawn chemisette and frills, her brown gloves, her thick brown shoes and stockings that could never disguise the true Stuart foot—Mary, who as a slender slip of a girl on the brink of her teens had played Calisto to Henrietta's Jupiter—oh! so long ago.

I—with my grey locks piled high too, in a lace cap and kerchief about my shoulders, a deep carnation-red gown of Indian cashmere from the celebrated bazaars (for I dared be a trifle less simply attired in my own rooms!) a fine gold chain of Dutch workmanship with a pendant of worked gold and bosses of opaque dark coral and translucent cornelian—was busy with my embroidery frame, a safeguard, sometimes, since I always had to be on the watch with the Princess, most of all when she spoke unguardedly to me.

She liked Henrietta, but it was impossible for her to forget Anna Monmouth, one of her greatest friends, though some ten years her senior, at her uncle's Court; and Henrietta, for her part, proud, sure of her own conscience, utterly refusing to be condoned as a mistress yet knowing she was no wife, was not the easiest person to deal with—with all the memories of the past behind both of them! And there were William's orders to Mary, and Monmouth's superb taking for granted that what he did was always right; perhaps, in the flush of his success, he was just a trifle blind to Henrietta's actual position and to any difficulties whatever where his cousin Mary was concerned!

"He does as he pleases with us all," said Mary

frankly, "just as I remember him years and years ago. Oh, but he makes me feel old, Madame Stuart! He is not a minute older himself, and I—it is half my lifetime since then."

"You old, Highness?" I laughed. "Spare *me*, I am double your age! But does it matter? His Grace will never age; he is a boy in looks and, I fear me, in brains," and I sighed and she sighed, but then we laughed together.

"He—he goes through life at a gallop," said Mary. "We were so quiet here, and he has made us dreadfully frivolous. The Prince"—she paused, and glanced sidelong at me as I think her great-great-grandmother Mary of Scots used to do—"the Prince seems to enjoy it vastly, I have never known him to care for pleasure before, why is it, Madame?"

"Nay, Highness," I replied, deep in my work, "if you know not, how should I say? But M. de Monmouth is infectious in his gaiety; he makes an old woman like me feel young, aye, and *be* young, and as frivolous as the rest. Do you know, Madame, he came here yesterday" (I bit my lip; it was perhaps foolish to talk of his visits) "and said he had wearied all your ladies out with trying over that new contre-danse, and only you were still fresh, and he must needs show me how the steps went, and before I knew what I was about we had pushed back this table and the settle and I was being taught it from beginning to end!"

"So now, Mistress, you have no excuse. You will come to our ball to-morrow night, and—come early, and you shall instruct M. Bentinck, who dances admirably, but . . ."

"'But?' Highness," I smiled. "There is a 'but,' is there not? Perhaps he will learn from me, a sedate old lady, and then when your ball begins,

I will sit in a corner and watch you all, as becomes my white hairs."

"Yes, you will try to," said Mary, leaning forward and laying a long Stuart hand on the edge of my embroidery frame, "and my cousin will suddenly appear before you, and bow" (how well I remember those bows!) "and you will find yourself led into the middle of the floor before you can protest. Why, he would have led out the Prince himself long before now had he been a lady! Be very brave, Madame, and ask his Highness to dance yourself. He will never refuse you."

"Will he not?" I thought, but only laughed. "Nay, the Prince and I are serious folk—we will watch you and His Grace. Ah, it is good to see two Stuarts dance once more!"

"But I am a Stuart no longer," she said quickly.

"And what is James, Highness?" I asked, looking at her, and the colour rose in her fair face. "And I," I went on as quickly, "what am I? A distant cousin, once the wife of another cousin." "And what," I said to myself, "what is the Prince? with his Stuart mother. How strangely un-Stuart and yet——" I thought of the Duke of York, and wondered if those two, uncle and nephew, father-in-law and son-in-law, were not hopelessly antagonistic just because of a certain twinship of one side of their characters? I wondered; I wonder still. For I know now that never was hate more deadly than when Stuart hated Stuart.

I gave way. I went to their Highnesses' ball. I looked up some of my old Whitehall finery, and said to myself that for once I would be young again, to the delight of my maid, whose joy it was to make me fine. So the full uncut velvet skirts were shaken

out of their sandalwood coffer, their ivory only a trifle deepened, their charming gold embroidery, so pure a thread, untarnished, wrought into scallops like big cockle-shells all round the edges of the upper skirt, which was drawn back to show the under petticoat, a satin just matching the gold, half hidden in lace. The corsage was draped about with lace twisted in and out with my long string of carved gold beads, the sash of cobweb gold tissue heavily weighted with great golden tassels, the little transparent shell-shaped cap rose above the high-dressed hair, held in place by a gold-set tortoise-shell comb confining the light veil of tissue as fine as gilt gossamer, the golden shoes, the stockings worked with gold, the big gilt fan—no, I would not disgrace England at this my last ball—here. My last ball—anywhere? A dull depression settled on my heart as I turned from my mirror and let my woman wrap my great furred cloak around me. Why last? Were we not all going back to England soon, to our beloved Whitehall, where we danced twice and thrice a week? Of course we were! and to-night we would be as gay and show them we had not forgotten. . . . "Madame must guard against a chill," my maid was saying. "The storms are over at length" (we had had a fortnight's rough weather and no packets had been able to cross), "but to-night it is still—still! See the stars, and listen how those great clumsy wheels ring on the heavy stones. The chair waits, Madame," and I was shut carefully into my sedan among my furs, and went forth into the bitter night. "Now the mails will come in surely, surely," I said to myself, as I started for the Huis ten Bosch—it had been hard work waiting all those long days; it seemed an age since we had heard from England.

Since it was the last ball to which I ever went, it is worth remembering.

The Dutch were stolid, sober folk, but when they chose they could make a brave display. Their men were fine upstanding creatures, heavily handsome, some in the more English fashion of fair William Bentinck, some with the magnificent colouring of the favourite of William's later life, Keppel, who was made Albemarle. The women in their youth were splendid Rubens wenches, all cream and roses and masses of flaxen hair; they could not take their eyes from Monmouth and their Princess, who opened the ball with an exquisite minuet. Mary, at her brightest, in high if nervous spirits, and a truly lovely gown of orange satin over a petticoat of pearl embroidery draped with Flanders lace fringed with pear-shaped pearls; Monmouth (but neither could I look away from him!) at his incredibly handsomest, from head to foot in white silk brocaded with silver and diamonds, diamond buttons, shoe-buckles, a diamond-hilted sword, a tall, slight, infinitely graceful figure with the perfect balance and poise of an athlete, rider, runner, and dancer; matched, in the marvellous measure they trod together on the dark polished floor, by the fair smiling flushed Lady Mary of old days, nearly as fine a dancer as he, and quite as fond of it!—a sight I shall not forget, and one to whose memory I return and return.

Over all, William on the raised dais, his keen hawk's eyes taking everything in, his firm lips relaxed in a gracious smile, his dress unusually rich—violet velvet and black satin, with a splendidly embroidered sash and inlaid sword—watching, as I watched, watched and wondered what was behind that smile and those brilliant hazel eyes that saw everything, and looked out beyond everything.

Men whom I knew bowed, stood by my chair, paid the usual compliments, passed on, one or two (in whose eyes I saw a faint surprise and an arrested

curiosity as they took in the details of my unusual toillete!) lingering longer; women I was acquainted with, passing with their attendant cavaliers, pausing for a few smiling easy words, and again (to my amusement) with an interested scrutiny of my gown. I kept my chair in the quietest corner of the great saloon, and looked and listened, laying up for myself eye-memories of a wonderful scene, returning a word or two in the French that was as natural to me as English in Whitehall to M. d'Avaux, a tiny passing duel of words, (we hated each other and smiled all the sweeter in consequence!) a short conversation with M. Bentinck, who was less phlegmatic and more animated than was his wont, very handsome in blue silks, with a sort of restlessness about him I had seldom seen, and an air of distraction for all he endeavoured to make himself more agreeable than usual.

Under the whole atmosphere, as the night went on, there came clearer and clearer to me that sense of hidden unrest, of tension, as of a waiting for some event—some news—and what? I was glad Lady Wentworth had refused, pleading indisposition; I felt more and more nervous, and she would have increased it; at last I was aware that I wanted to scream! I rallied myself, tried to imagine what would happen if I suddenly rose and ran into the middle of the floor and cried out: "What is it?" And as I thought these words, they seemed to ring in my ears, to be whispered in the swish of the dancers' feet, to be echoed in the dying murmur of the music as the dancing ceased.

At that moment there was a little stir among the knot of gentlemen near William's seat, some one spoke to Bentinck, bowed quickly and disappeared; Bentinck swiftly drew close to William and bent over the carved back of his chair. William never looked

at him, but nodded, then motioned him away with an almost imperceptible movement of his right hand. Something occurred to me at that moment—"The mails are in, there is news. *What is it?*"—and I caught the arms of my chair and gripped them; and then the crowd about me parted, a light footfall sounded beside me, a ringing boyish voice cried out my name, Monmouth was bowing before my seat, and before I knew it—just as the Princess had predicted!—he had caught up both my hands from the arms of my chair, devoid of all ceremony, laughing, explaining, giving me no time to think, leading me into the middle of the gleaming floor.

"Just one—our old Dutch dance, my cousin—just to show how we used to dance it; how"—his voice sank—"we are going to dance it again overseas, soon, soon, soon!" and the music struck up and I was sinking down in the great sweeping curtsey at the beginning without a protest, my white and gold skirts spreading about me. I can see now the mirrored tip of my gold shoe in the parquet dark as polished agate, and the reflected shimmer in Monmouth's brown eyes, alight with mischief and mirth, as we began. "Aha! I vowed I would do it!" he whispered in my ear, as we floated slowly through the old familiar movements of the opening measure, "I wagered the Princess!" and the music swept us apart. "Bravo, Madame! this is how we shall dance again as of old before His Majesty, and he will laugh, and applaud, and say. . . ."

"*Bravo!*"

Bravo? The voice was not Monmouth's, nor the laugh which accompanied it. As I rose from the last curtsey I looked wildly round me, for the glittering crowd had receded—even William's dark face and Mary's, smiling, amused—and we two stood in the centre of the great room, but beside us was a tall

figure is sable satins, laughing night-dark eyes under heavy black curls, white teeth showing between curved lips—why was the King, my King, my cousin Charles standing there?—applauding lightly, smiling, looking from one to the other!

"*Why,* SIRE!" I cried with a little delighted gasp and turned joyfully to Monmouth; and then, puzzled beyond description at his blank unconcernedness, faltered, and turned back again to His Majesty, to curtsey, to greet him, to laugh with him, to thank him—and his son and I were alone in the middle of the ball-room, Monmouth looking at me with his unchanged bright smile and a jest on his lips that died away as he saw the horror on my face.

He did not comprehend, but he had not had twenty years at Court training for nothing; my hand was caught and held firmly, I was swiftly drawn back to my chair, through a maze of curious puzzled eyes that searched mine, amid a silence made more silent by the hush of breaths drawn quickly, and I was in my seat in the corner, Monmouth beside me still—still holding a hand which (I could feel it myself) was growing cold as a stone. He bent over me. "Sit back, do not try to speak, you are faint, we took that last passage too fast."

I tried to shake my head; I looked up into his kind, concerned, mystified eyes, and the wreath of lights about the saloon and the shimmering, glowing crowd swung round and turned dark, and cold, and retreated miles away. I covered my face with both my hands. I remember one of Monmouth's pages at my elbow with a cup of spiced wine; I recollect Anne Trelawney on her knees by my side holding a gold pomander under my nose, I recollect so well the design of it, and the sharp sweet scent, and the deplorable way in which her delightful peach-pink silken draperies were

crushed on the floor as she knelt, and dimly marvelled at the alarm in her looks.

Their Highnesses passed out between the bowing company, the crowd dispersed swiftly, Monmouth, still pausing to see that I was attended to, was summoned to follow. He spoke to the gentleman, one of William's A.D.C.'s, with slight impatience. "I'll attend his Highness shortly, but Madame Stuart——" and then the man interrupted him and said something I could not catch. "Immediately? I'll follow," and he was beside me again and took hold of the wrist of one of the hands still covering my face. "My cousin, forgive me, I must leave you. I do not understand, but the Prince has had important news, he has broken up the ball; I am to join him in his cabinet at once, I must go. Mrs. Trelawney, her Highness has sent a message to excuse your further attendance on her to-night, will you take Madame Stuart home as soon as she has recovered? I will send you back in my coach. Good-night—forgive me!" and he was gone, and Anne Trelawney, her pretty, silly, recklessly-laughing face haggard and drawn, was beside me again. "Oh, Madame, can you walk?—come this way," and we were in a little ante-room opening out of the ball-room, and, with her arm round me, she led me to a sofa by a bright fire. Somehow my cloak was there, brought by Monmouth's page, who, at a glance from her, slipped swiftly away again.

I had never liked what I had seen of Mrs. Trelawney. I had suspected, as was afterwards known, that she was the tool of the Duke of York (what was I but Charles's informant after all?) and she was an empty-headed, over-dressed, flighty creature, even if there were no real harm in her; but to-night, all Whitehall flooded back like a great wave as she sat down beside me on the little couch and held both my hands tightly.

"No," she said to me soothingly, "no, you were not faint. It is—it was—something else. I saw your face as the dance ceased. You spoke, Madame," (her eyes grew wide and dark, and her voice sank) "to whom did you speak? Something—some one—nobody else saw—you puzzled his Grace. *He* saw nought; you turned from him and you greeted . . . and back to my lord Duke, then again away, and your face turned grey and your eyes stared, *so*, and her Highness half rose from her chair and said sharply, 'There is somewhat amiss, Anne, go to her!—quick,' and the Duke took you back to your place, and you looked at him and at me and at all the company as if you did not see us."

"Aye," I said, "I saw you! But I did not see—what I had seen."

"Whom?" said Anne Trelawney, quivering all over. "Ah, do not speak—I know. I heard what you said. They—if they heard—did not understand. There is something terrible abroad to-night. The Prince has had despatches. I heard M. Bentinck whispering, he waited with her Highness till your measure was over. Oh, Madame! I saw you dance that, the night of my first ball at Whitehall, you and the——" Her voice died away; she held my hands more tightly and looked hard into my face. I was calmer than she by that time. The firelight played on our glistening gowns, rose and ivory, gold and pearls, on the rich Dutch marquetry furniture, the quaint porcelain (the Princess's pride), the glowing dark Dutch pictures, men and women, flowers and fruit, the dusky velvet hangings, the dusky velvet carpet beneath our feet.

"I remember," I said, "nearly half your lifetime ago, Mistress, nine—ten years! I remember. I danced that coranto with the King. . . ."

She let go my hands and rose suddenly, putting

aside one of the heavy curtains and looking out into the night. I sat where I was, while she sought in the crowded courtyard below for the coach that was to take me back, and looked over her head at the stars, diamond-clear in a sky of black ice, all the storm over, at peace; and as I looked I said soundlessly to myself, "The King—the King—the King."

She took me back to my lodgings, Monmouth's page attending us, and Monmouth's footmen; she went away in the fine gilt coach with a smile and a bright farewell to me before the servants, and I went slowly upstairs to my bedroom with my maid behind me. I sat down before the glass with a gesture of utter weariness, then shook myself quickly and looked straight into the mirror—only for a moment, for my eyes fixed themselves on the reflection of my woman's face behind mine. I did not speak, but in the glass our eyes met. "They say the mail-packet has been in these two hours," she said slowly. "They say there is news out of England. Have you heard, Madame?—do you know?"

"I have not heard," I said. "No, not heard. But I know," and suddenly I laughed and rose from my chair. "God save the King!" I cried softly, and as I said it, I wheeled round upon her. "Go—I do not need you—I——"

She turned to the door.

"Good-night, Madame," her hand was on the latch. "God the save the King, Madame, *but which King?* God send you sweet sleep," and the door was shut and I was alone, standing in my bravery before the lighted looking-glass. I made a swift step and extinguished the candles, felt my way to the broad window-seat, drew back the curtains, and looked out over the sleeping town and up to those eternal stars,

that seemed to have been shining for years over my head. I flung open the casement and let in a rush of keen air—air with a whiff of the sea in it, air that seemed to dance with the swinging music of a hundred chimes that rang midnight over the city of my exile, that rang down the curtain on the last act of my life as servant, as subject, as kinswoman, as friend of King Charles. I stood still and erect till they had died away, and then I shut the window and crept back into the darkness.

"God save the King!" I said aloud. "God save you, my King. God send you sweet sleep," and I fell on my knees by the bedside.

MY LAST INTERVIEW WITH KING MONMOUTH

CHAPTER XXIII

MY LAST INTERVIEW WITH KING MONMOUTH

You saw but the dream awry
  Of a Royal crown,
A golden sun in your sky,
  That in blood went down;
A future of Heaven-in-Hell,
  And Fame that lured and leered,
Life that you loved too well,
  And Death you feared,
Glory that turned to shame
  And misery wan;
—As only a King you came,
  But you died a Man!

M. N.

The cold grey dawn crept slowly into my room, and found me lying straight and stiff in the big four-post bed, my hands clenched by my sides, great tears rolling slowly down out of the corners of my eyes and soaking into my hair. The next morning!—the awful next morning that we all have to endure after our dear present has fallen to pieces and left us face to face with our own loneliness and the long years of an empty future.

I loved the King, and the King was dead. Oh, my cousin Charles! Not the little fainting Queen whose cry for pardon was her farewell, not Louise de Querouaille whose long reign was over, not poor merry Nelly whose name was the last on your lips, were more heartbroken than your faithful Charlotte Stuart who was nothing whatever to you. Nothing at all! Will any man understand—would you have understood?—that I smiled through my tears and

shook my head as I thought of that, and was glad, glad all the love had been on my side. Women are strange. Yet I had never wanted you to care, I think I had wanted you *not* to care. It was part of my service and my giving, therein lay my pride, perhaps my wisdom. Silly woman as I always was, there for once I had been wise. But you died, cousin Charles, and the soul Milady Cleveland had vowed I could never again call my own was at my disposal once more. The King's bondswoman was free.

All night long the air of the single coranto rang in my head. All night your son and I re-trod on the shining floor the little Dutch dance that Lucy Walter had taught you both, and the first rays of light fell on ivory and golden draperies lying on the couch where they had been cast the night before, my beautiful Whitehall gown. My golden fan lay beside it—with a sort of faint wonder I noticed that its gleaming sticks were snapped across. I raised myself on my elbow and looked at them both with the eyes of a nun who has put off for the last time the vanities of this world. My lodgings were very still. The only sound audible was the slow, heavy ticking of the huge Dutch clock in the entry below. "All—over, all—over, all—over!" All was over indeed; a friend, a protector, and the kindest of masters was gone; an enemy sat in his place—mine, and, implacably and unchangingly, James's. Why, from what I knew, James's very life would be in danger in England. Well, he was not in England! Had he been there, and the Duke of York here in his stead—— The tortured brain went round and round, always coming back, as a mind will when half crazed by some tremendous shock, to what might have been rather than to what is. There were some things that even I (who,

coward as I am, never shirk from facing all possibilities) dared not dwell on then. I wrenched my thoughts away, and the old coranto went gaily on; I heard the whisper of velvet and lace slipping over polished boards, the sip-sip of our shoes, the murmur of Monmouth's mischievous asides. My dear James—neither could I bear to think of him now in his grief and his despair. But there was nothing I could bear to think of. I had lost all the past, I saw before me the desolation of the future, as for the present, the solid ground failed beneath my feet.

So came James of York into his kingdom, and Monmouth's fair château en Espagne crumbled and fell down into dust. I think Monmouth must have been a Stuart without any doubt, he was so desperately unfortunate. All would have gone otherwise had Charles recalled him three weeks earlier—and he had not. Even in the first outburst of frenzied distress I do not think Monmouth in the least realised how completely wrecked was his castle in Spain by the simple fact of his uncle's being at Whitehall in power and he exiled in Holland. Reverse those circumstances —and History might well have been changed. I do not know, but I think—I think!

So the end came for Monmouth, not at Sedgemoor, not on Tower Hill, but in William's cabinet after the ball, when the Stadtholder broke to his guest and cousin the news of his father's death. It would seem that Fortune had had enough of James Walter! From that moment she turned her back on him, and I would with all my heart that he had seen her do it. Did she smile on James Stuart? Not for long! There exist three portraits of the sailor king that I think of at this juncture, two painted by Kneller and one by Le Troy. Well do I know them! The first[1]

[1] The National Portrait Gallery.

was executed in May 1685—the new monarch stands smiling, triumphant, successful, his Crown and Orb by his side, his Sceptre in his hand, the regal ermine robes about his tall handsome figure, the tumbling waves of his seas in the background. The world went very well then! The next picture[1] was painted as a present for Samuel Pepys, and while James was sitting for it they brought him news that William was coming with his great fleet on the wings of the Protestant wind. He still smiles, uneasily, mournfully, the sun has gone in, the glory has departed, it is harder work wearing dead men's shoes than waiting for them! And the third portrait[2] comes from France. There are the insignia of Royalty, majesty of profusely curled peruke, laces, jewels, shining armour and Garter ribbon, and the worn, haggard face of a broken man in exile—a king whose castle also has crumbled into dust.

Who won after all, James of York or James of Monmouth?

And thus ended all our hopes—nay, let me say, all mine. For, as the world knows, Monmouth left the Prince and Princess of Orange, left all the gay doings and light-hearted merriment he had brought to the Dutch Court—and with his leaving, all gaiety left it too—and went away at once, taking with him Henrietta Wentworth only, and after a while settled down at Gouda in a little house, among fine trees near the beautiful great church, shut in by high garden walls, a place of peace, could Peace have stayed anywhere with Monmouth! Philadelphia went among Dutch relations, innocent visits, seemingly; but her

[1] In the possession of Miss Pepys-Cockerell.
[2] At Belhus.

ambition was still unquenched, and now I can guess at her work, since I know what was the work done by the English and Scottish exiles within the following few weeks.

As for me—which was darker, the present or the future? My light was out. But we do not cease to live because our day is over. I had audience with the Princess once (she sent for me); it was a difficult meeting for both of us. She had been bidden to convey to me a hint that it would be better I should return to England, that was plain; I read it in her face when first I saw her. I for my part had something to discover if I could—William's real attitude. I remember little of what we said, we were both so careful that I think our very care betrayed each of us; indeed at the end we smiled at each other as I rose to take my leave.

"Highness," I said. "This is farewell, I think; but I have to thank you for all your kindness. If I go back to Whitehall"—I paused—"*if*, Highness, may I say to—to His Majesty your father that you send him assurances of your love and duty?"

This was perilous work, but I was past all fear. My world had broken over my head like a many-coloured bubble, and I at least owed no allegiance to William of Orange. Her eyes flashed for a moment, and then her face softened. "Go you to Whitehall, Madame?" she asked in return. "To assure the King my father of your own duty?" and when I threw up a hand like a man touched in a fencing-bout, and smiled awry and made my curtsey, she took my fingers between her own and held them a moment, and looked at me sadly with those beautiful brown Stuart eyes of hers, and we stood silent together, and together our cheeks were wet with tears. "Good-bye, Madame," she said, "and a good journey, wherever you go. Our youth

is over, I think. If you see the Duke of Monmouth——" and she broke off. "Yes?" I asked, and waited; but she shook her head, and smiled again through her tears—and so I parted from the Lady Mary.

When I next met her she was on the English throne.

All this time—it seemed endless to me, but in reality it was not long—I heard nothing from Monmouth, but there came letters from Henrietta sometimes, and she, who had somehow drawn back from me nearly all the time when outwardly things went well for us all in Holland, now wrote, if guardedly, yet with a note of underlying affection which gladdened my heart. She had been very ill indeed with a miscarriage not so many months before, and at the time of the King's death it was believed she had further hopes—at least, she went nowhere, and so allowed it to be understood. Her first child, born in my house at St. Stephen's, did not live very long, but she had a splendid boy born at Toddington in 1682; after his birth she never seemed to me really strong, and she certainly came near death in her illness in the spring of 1684, nearly a year past. She wrote but little of her health, but her once fine clear writing was shaky, and underlying all she said of the Duke ran a strain of anxiety not without a touch of exaltation, at which I guessed, and the reason for which I feared.

I thought everything over, and made my plans. I had my few belongings packed and they were taken secretly to England for me in the ship of a Dutch captain related to the good woman who kept my lodgings; my maid and I, in the lightest travelling order, removed to Amsterdam and lay there for a night or two, finding the place seething with gossip and the exiles seemingly busy. In after years I was

to see something of Jacobite activities for James II's luckless son, and I remembered and marvelled at the same feverish semi-secret turmoil, the much-whispered and the little done! But I wished to hear all there was to be heard from head-quarters, and I sent a message to Gouda asking Henrietta if I might come out to them for one day. Back came an answer at once, and a line from Monmouth scribbled under Henrietta's charming reply, bidding me most welcome, quoting the old saying I was wont to use to him in the days at St. Stephen's: "This house is yours"; but I would not stay there, I wished only to see them both, and then I would go back to Scotland, or, if he wished it, to England, and serve him there in secret if I could serve him at all. I must see for myself—why, in five minutes I should know Monmouth's designs, merely by looking at his face! Surely, since I had always read him so well, I could do it still?

I went absolutely alone. In my deepest mourning, plain to a nun-like simplicity, with the large enfolding cloak and closely drawn hood over all, I looked nothing more or less than a respectable burgess's dame on her lawful occasions. The barge that slowly and cumbrously conveyed me along the sluggish canal set me on the path, as I knew, a hundred yards from the high brick wall and discreet doorway I was in search of. About me the spring was bursting into leaf, the fields where the bulbs were grown were already gemmed with colour—I might be going back to an *English* spring! What would it hold for England? I put away that thought and sought my destination. Monmouth's butler, a man who had followed his fortunes almost ever since his boyish marriage (who was later to tell a strange and awful tale of a survival of the Bloody Assize), admitted me with the privileged greeting of an old

friend, and Henrietta Wentworth, ceremony dispensed with, ran down the brick path between the tulips to meet me. I was taken at once into her little parlour—I must put up with her company alone for a while—a messenger had just ridden over, some gentlemen were expected momently, but they would not stay long, meantime——.

"Meantime, *His Majesty* is deep in affairs, how else?" I said, and looked at her. The quick colour flooded her face, her eyes—those strange long eyes that darkened to black at moments of emotion—shot a half-terrified, half-elated look at me, and her quick flow of talk checked, for spite of the brilliant carmine in her cheeks, the light in her eyes, perhaps because of them, I was horrified to see how ill she looked—thin, transparent almost, as if the flame of her spirit were burning in too frail a lantern. "My child!" I cried in distress, "but you, how are *you* ? I heard—but is it true?"

"Hush," she whispered, looking hastily round her, and going over to the open window to shut it (I can see her fine profile now, clear against the lattice and the gay green and glowing world of leaf and blossom outside); then she came back, and sat down by me. "No, it is not true—not *that*. But you must not tell—*him*, even. I am not very well, Madame"—she looked at her thin hands locked in her lap—"but it will pass. I shall be better later on. But I am staying behind—here, and *he* thinks I cannot accompany him, because—— Madame, it must be thus. He must not think—have any anxiety on my account; he has so much, so many other things to deal with."

So I was answered, without a question. He was full of affairs, he had much to worry him, *she* was remaining in Holland, *he* was going. . . .

We sat and looked steadily at each other. My

lips tried to form the word: "When?" but there was no need.

"As soon as may be," she answered my thoughts, "but there is much to do, and my Lord Argyle is in so desperate a haste, and there is no money! but the advices out of England are hopeful—oh! so much is promised, so many are only waiting his landing; he wished for delay for prudence' sake"—the tawny eyes clouded a little—"but they all press him. They are ready, all seems, all *is* in train; he cannot, he *will not* hold back. Early next month, we believe, and then, he will send for me. Ah, Madame!" and she caught my shoulders, "I shall be well again, oh, quite well in England; we shall all be well, all will be well! And you?"

"I go next week," I said, I, who did not know that I was going at all five minutes earlier! "I shall be at St. Stephen's, quietly; if there is aught I can do—beforehand—you must tell me, but I'll talk it over, if there be time, with His Majesty"; and here, undemonstrative, proud, self-controlled woman as she was, she suddenly burst into tears and hid her face on my shoulder, her arms going round my neck. "Oh, my friend, my friend!" but no further words came. There was a step in the passage, a light swift step; through the lattice I could see the butler conducting two or three gentlemen to the gate. Henrietta was out of my arms, her eyes dry, her face composed in a serene smile, before the door flew open and Monmouth came in with a rush.

"Cousin, your pardon—I am always asking your pardon!—forgive me, as ever," and he came at me with outstretched hands. "Why——?" for I had eluded this greeting, had sunk in the deep, swooning Whitehall curtsey at his feet.

"Your Majesty's servant!" I said, and rose, to

be caught, as I recovered from my salutation, by both hands, and kissed soundly on both cheeks.

"A plague on your ceremoniousness!" he said to me, laughing, his eyes crinkling up in the old way, his colour, like Henrietta's, mounting under the warm olive of his skin, like a delighted boy. "Who am I to you but James? What other shall I ever be?"

Alas, alas, what other? I look back at it all now, and wonder how it is that I, old, white-haired, all my life done, all my future as dead and buried as my past, can still be living, while that life and laughter, that youth and vitality incarnate, lie cold and still in a dishonoured grave.

It is not possible—but it is true.

And Charles, who had parted from me calling me cousin as did his son, kissing me, laughing, jesting, lies as cold and still under a plain square flagstone in Westminster Abbey. Back into my mind came, not a memory of the gay light-hearted past, but a vision of the long canal down which I had just travelled, that stretched behind my slowly-surging barge, out of sight in the green distance that lay before me, through the little town and out beyond, direct, inexorable as Fate.

So, as a drowning man is supposed to see all his life in a flash, did I, in an instant's thought, see a straight, unchanging line run through all I knew and loved—my life, that was to be lived somehow, somewhere, in spite of everything. So have I felt with this life—it is all the same. Everything changes, but one goes on.

It was late in the afternoon when I saw Monmouth alone. "Rest—make her rest, cousin, she's too

easily tired," with a hand on Henrietta's shoulder and an appeal to me, and she smiled and laid her cheek down on his hand and left the room with just one glance that caught my eye as she passed out. Did he not see? But he saw nothing. "She would be better later on," he assured me (her own words!). "She was anxious, and women take these things hard, but—well, when we all meet again, my cousin, why then we'll have no more anxiety, no more tiredness, no more ceremony, eh? Oh yes, for once, perhaps, when you come to Court for the first time as my Lady Stuart!"

"James, James," I said, "you go too fast for me. Am I to be ennobled?—coronets in your pocket already for all your ladies?"

"For all my dear, devoted, faithful friends," he replied, serious now. "You will see I shall not forget." I stopped in the middle of the garden path we were pacing side by side; somehow that speech hurt as nothing he had ever said before had hurt me. It was the old inuendo, the old accusation levelled against Charles, *his* forgetfulness of his friends; this to me who had adored him, whom he had never forgotten. One by one faces passed before my mind's eye—faces of men, a few, and of women, a many—that had been forgotten, not by Charles, but by the young man standing at my side, swinging a careless cane over the early tulips and laughing to see their handsome heads fall as he struck them.

But of what use was it to speak? Had I expected a house of mourning? Henrietta had never cared for the King, and Monmouth, heigho! Monmouth was full of coming kingship for himself, for a great future, another Restoration, and an ending of more Stuart travels, port after stormy seas. The Stuarts —ah, they forgot! and they never remembered that

they had forgotten. Of what use was it to remind a Stuart? One laughed—and went on. So we went on, laughing, and left the tulips' severed heads on the garden path.

Henrietta carried me up to her chamber before the hour for the arrival of the returning barge, and we said farewell there. Monmouth had given me a key to his cypher, I was to await instructions on my arrival in England, he would write; meanwhile, would I write to Henrietta? whose mother was to join and stay with her, and I must send my letters from England through certain safe Dutch hands, "and so the vigilance of my uncle James and the—say, the curiosity—of my cousin William will not be tried by your correspondence!" (Another gay laugh; "he laughs too much," I said to myself, "he is trying to make himself feel sure.")

I bade no long drawn-out adieux to Lady Wentworth, and yet I wondered in my heart if I should ever see her again. Before I went I put my hand into my black gown, unfastened a clasp, and drew forth my beautiful string of black pearls, my sole remaining jewel of any value, and laid it quietly on her toilette-table. "That may be worth a few troopers to James!" I said.

I laughed, I kissed her, I refused to listen to any protests, I bade her rest again, and went quickly down the stairs, since the hour had come for the barge to pass on its return journey.

Monmouth was at the gate and drew my hand through my arm. "Come, cousin Charlotte," he said, "I will set you on your way, and you shall wish me God-speed on mine. And when you come to Whitehall, my dear, you shall not come in these trappings of woe," and he looked sideways at my sable draperies. I made an effort and altered my mood to his.

"No, I'll fly"—I dropped my voice to the merest whisper—"I'll fly the King's colours, the Whig blue! I'll have a new gown if I have to sell St. Stephen's Farm to buy it."

"Nay, you shall send the bill in to me," he laughed. "I will pay. I swear that I'll pay all debts, even my own!"

At this moment there came a gentleman galloping in much haste along the towing-path, reining up almost on the top of us, with an important air, and a great flourish of his hat.

"Grey, of course," said Monmouth, "and on urgent business as ever, also of course. I'faith, he shall wait."

"Never because of me," I said firmly. "See, the barge is in sight. Go, I would not keep you." And as he wavered irresolutely for a moment: "Why, take him within at least," I laughed bravely, "it will be some minutes yet, see, I will walk up and down awhile."

"I will return," cried Monmouth, wheeling round and running lightly towards the gate where Lord Grey was at that moment dismounting. "Await me—just one word with him—I must take leave of you. I cannot let you go like this!"—and he was gone. I saw them enter, the barge drew nearer and nearer, ponderously, irresistibly, paused at the little landing-stage, and waited for me, the sole passenger, to come aboard. I hesitated, I looked over my shoulder, but the door was shut, and it remained shut. I never saw it open again. I stepped on to the barge, and the heavy vessel creaked and groaned and drove forward once more through the oily water; and so Monmouth left me, and never in life came back.

But in death he came back to me, I, at least,

took my leave of him, at peace, his travels all over, lying on his bier in the Bell Tower on the night of July the 15th. And I came not to greet him, but to set him on his way and wish him God-speed, not in the gay blue gown, but in the same black weeds, to see the last of the Stuart who had forgotten even to say good-bye to me. No, they never said it—Charles would not, when he sent me to Holland; Monmouth did not, when he sent me back to England. Why should there be parting phrases between us, since we have never been parted? "What's Death?—you'll love me yet!"

But I would not have you think it was all sad, or that it is all sad even now. If I remember so well how I quitted those two men so very dear to me, yet there is this—that we parted with smiles and we bade no farewell, for one would not have it said, and the other did not. So I think of them, now that I have naught more to do, not of the days when they were busy or careless or sinful, not of the times when they were worried or unhappy or in danger, not as growing older, not as drawing near death, not as dead; but as the kind, witty, beloved King I served, and the dear, gay, sweet-tempered prince his son; and sitting alone in the twilight, I hear the echo of their laughter and feel the touch of their fingers on mine and their lips on my cheek, I meet bright brown eyes, I listen to the sound of light steps, catch the sparkle of jewels, the click of high heels, the clink of a scabbarded sword. And you may read your histories as they have been written since, and see in them no love that these men had for man or woman, but false friendship and evil lust, and the worthy and the righteous bespatter their

names and belittle their memories. So be it. There was a woman who loved them, for all their faults, as they loved her (for all hers!), and who once knew them well, and hopes to know them better some day.

THE TOWER OF LONDON

CHAPTER XXIV

THE TOWER OF LONDON

We sang no more when the song was done;
(Yet the echo rings in my heart to-day,)
"Crowns will be lost, and crowns will be won,
And crowns will be thrown away!"
Fame is to win, if high Heaven will,—
Life is to lose, if black failure shames,—
But Love dies never on Tower Hill,
James!
(*King Monmouth.*)
M. N.

Not only did I have a dreadfully anxious and wretched journey to England, but I broke down altogether once I got there. I was practically without money, and my maid and I had to rough it to an almost unbearable extent; nobody made any plans for me nor supplied my wants, nor sent even a manservant to escort me over, we had to fend for ourselves, and it was a horrible business. Already suspicions were afoot as to Monmouth's intentions, though he did not sail for England and his "rebellion" till the end of the following month after all, Argyle getting away to Scotland at the beginning; and it did not make things simpler for women passengers by the packets or by public coach, a weary business at best, back to St. Albans. As I say, it was not only interminable but trying, and I arrived at St. Stephen's Farm only to collapse, and for two months I never left my bed. I was torn by anxiety, for I got but little news, the only spark of comfort lay in the fact that no instructions came from Monmouth for me to carry out—which anyhow I could not have done;

later I found they had been sent, but were stopped ere they left Holland, it was suspected by the agents of the Prince of Orange,—but this made waiting in suspense no easier.

Once Lord Bruce did visit me; he went out of waiting some time in May for a short while, and returned to see his father, then on his death-bed—he died in the following July—at their country place beyond Toddington (you remember the story of the stag-hunt and the deer swimming the great ponds?) and on his way he stopped and waited on me. Dear Bruce, he was no more the long-legged cheery boy of our old gay days, but a sensible, serious married man —prematurely serious, I think, since he as well as I was utterly heartbroken over Charles's loss.

It was a strange interview. He came up to my room and sat by my bed for over an hour, in his fine London clothes that stirred so many memories. Neither he nor I could speak when we first met, and I soon saw he longed for news of Monmouth and Henrietta, and yet would not ask me. We both tried to say a little, but I was ill, and fearful of speaking too freely of Monmouth, even to him (after all, he was King James's gentleman)! We began, and we both broke down, and when we were calmer, we went back to the subject of King Charles, and then there was no restraint, neither of our words nor our tears, we wept together quite frankly. We had both lost the best friend and master ever known, and we knew it, and it was good to say it; in this incarnation I have read Ailesbury's Memoirs many times, and realise that, fifty years later, when all the rest of us were dead, he wrote exactly as he talked to me on the lovely May day of that most fateful year. His personal love never failed for Monmouth and Henrietta, nor his friendship with me—in later life I saw him many times, but after the day when we both stood

together at the entrance of the great vault when they carried her coffin in, less than a year after, Thomas Bruce and I never spoke of her again in this world.

I tried, I remember, to ask him of King James—there the door was courteously shut in my face. I saw and understood at once, and patted the laced sleeve of his fine coat. "Well, well!" I said, "I have lain here long enough. Next month I trust I shall be on my feet again, and then I will come up to town." He looked somewhat embarrassed, courtier as he was.

"To Whitehall, Madame?" he said. "I fear—you see his present Majesty is much pressed for room. He has rearranged the apartments——" here for the first time during our interview I laughed, much to his surprise; then he understood and laughed too. I leant back on the pillows propping me, and drew the laces around my hair closer.

"Ah, Bruce!" I said, "I do not think to trouble His Majesty, and as for my old rooms, did you fancy I should expect them swept and garnished, awaiting me all this time?"

"Nay, Madame," he smiled. "But—you understand. There has been a good deal of sweeping and garnishing at Whitehall, but lodgings do not stand empty. His Majesty's priests——"

"Why," said I, "it will do my rooms good to have a holy man in them! Belike we were too worldly and frivolous there," and I broke off, remembering who had frequented them so often, to laugh and jest, and be at ease, innocently, after all. "The town is wide, and I have still friends. If I come to wait on the King, will you obtain me an audience?" I said this half in joke, but with meaning. He stood up, towering in my low chamber, his good honest face troubled but determined. I leant back on my pillows

again with one of my old wicked laughs, and waited for him to speak.

"Madame," he said once more, and stopped. "Madame, we are old friends. Let us play this game with our cards on the table. I serve the present King; I do my best to serve him honestly. You and he——" again he stopped, and I nodded without a smile now.

"I and he?—yes, my lord, let that pass. We understand each other. If I come to Whitehall to pay my respects to His Majesty, you introduce and are responsible for me? If I come for any other reason, I apply elsewhere for admittance—that is it, is it not? Are there enough of my cards visible, my friend, or," I shook the loose arms of the little silken over-jacket covering my night-smock, "do I keep an ace or so up my sleeve?"

He smiled a little twisted smile, sad, whimsical, yet full of understanding. "I can guess at your hidden cards, you could show me nothing fresh. But I am the King's servant, yet, Madame, always yours!"

I lay still after he had gone and thought over the words. He guessed; he knew. Who did not? If any one did not, it was that King he served! And I—I had been my King's servant, and my maid's words came back to me the night we had our fatal news out of England: "But which King?"

Madame Carey, you were not in London, nor anywhere accessible, during those months of my illness. I cannot quite recall why, nor where you were, I only know that you had a chance denied to me, and took it: that you saw Monmouth alive, while I was too late.

I cannot dwell upon the time that followed. My

dragging convalescence was proceeding, but my anxiety was increasing daily, for, from getting but little news, the moment was to come when *all* ceased, and, wild as were the rumours that shook St. Albans, nothing certain could be gathered. I did hear of Monmouth's landing, and that he was doing well, his army augmented, the devotion of the West country reawakening; then I felt I could bear no more, and I must go to London. I wrote, guardedly, to Mistress Katherine Crofts, at Whitehall, but received no reply. I then made up my mind to hire a coach and go straightway, intending to lodge in the village of Chelsea, where I knew of a house belonging to a servant of the late King, once also in Mrs. Gwyn's service, to whom I could secretly go. So one of my men went into St. Albans to bespeak me a coach, and came back with a puzzled face, with the news that I could not have one, and he did not understand why not. This roused the suppressed but by no means tamed Stuart temper in me! *I* could have no coach? I would know the reason why! I found my servants collected in the little hall, my hind scratching his tousled head. "There—there is a stranger at the gate, Madame," he stammered. "He came from the town with me; I was followed."

It is to be confessed I thought the fellow had been drinking, discreet, sober yokel as he usually was, and long in my employ. Had he talked too much, and so been shadowed by a spy? "A stranger?" I cried imperiously. "Send him to me." They looked uneasy, whispered among themselves, finally my own woman came forward.

"Madame, he wears no uniform, but . . ."

This was enough for me. In the bright June sunshine I stepped out of the hall door, I was down the path to the gate in a flash, despite my past weakness,

and out into the road. And before me stood a man whom I knew at a glance for a soldier despite his civilian gear.

"Your ladyship's pardon," he said in answer to my demand, "What is thy business, fellow?" "Your ladyship's pardon, my business is the King's."

"And the King's orders?" I said, realising in one instant my situation.

"Are, that if your ladyship is wise, you will remain quietly at home, in the unsettled state of the country at present."

"The King orders *me* that?" I asked, outwardly calm, inwardly cold with anger.

"Nay, Madame, not altogether so; but he orders me to see you stay!"

So I was a prisoner, with King James's sentry set on guard over me.

I gave a little laugh; I could not help it. "His Majesty shall be obeyed," I said. "Do not fear that I shall give thee trouble. I will lie peacefully within till the country is settled," and I went back with my head high—beaten. "Monmouth, my dear!" I said to myself, "you will have to come and take me out of this before I can go to your palace in my new blue gown to kiss your hand as Countess Stuart!"

Somehow or other I lived through the next few weeks. I received no letters, and those I wrote I shrewdly suspected never reached their destination. I made up my mind to wait in patience, and if possible to hear no rumours when I could get no definite news. Easier said than done! St. Albans was *seething*, and somehow my underlings daily obtained something or other in the way of intelligence—my back premises hummed, sotto voce, till I felt distracted. I had remained in the garden for a lifetime, it seemed, till one day I could bear it no longer. At least I must go to the little grey church

a stone's throw from my gates, to kneel in prayer in my old place near the pillar on which to this day is scratched, "May the King come," in Latin, by a prisoner of Cromwell's. Surely I should be permitted that? and so without ado I went to the front gate and spoke to the sentry.

"Is it forbidden me to go to church for half an hour?" I said, and smiled. "On parole if thou wilt, my man." He was perfectly civil; he saluted.

"If Madame permits, I go too," and so it was done. I do not think I had ever felt quite what it was to be a prisoner before, till I walked down that country lane, with a guard a couple of steps behind me on the other side of the road, and so into the church beside the great cedar under which Henry VIII courted Anne Boleyn (who lies a few feet from Monmouth under the Altar of St. Peter ad Vincula), and to my prayers beside the old and rough-hewn pillar, my eyes on the motto: "Adveniat Rex!" and my gaoler, stiff as a ramrod, in the aisle next to me. "May the King come." I think that was all my prayer. I can remember saying no more at all.

And that day the King, my King Monmouth, came to London a prisoner too.

It was not till the actual 15th of July I knew anything for certain, and then I knew for certain all hope was over. On that fatal morning my maid came to me and drew my curtains, and said: "Madame, if you look out of the window, you will see that you are free; the sentry has been removed." My heart gave a great leap—free! then—but I looked at her face and my leaping heart sank—sank. "What is it?" I said in a whisper. She shook her head.

"I cannot tell you. But he went a moment ago. And first of all he came to us women, and told us we

could come and go as we would, and that you, Madame, could have your coach for London—and—he was a good fellow, the coach is to come in an hour. Do you want it still, Madame? What is there to go for? You would be too late—too late"—her stern features suddenly relaxed, and she buried her face in her apron—"too late to see his Grace—His Majesty" (in a choked whisper). "The execution is to be this morning at half-past ten of the clock on Tower Hill. . . . Are you still for the road, Madame? What can you do?"

"Something," I said. "Yes, I am for the road." And when the coach came in an hour's time I was ready for it.

Of my journey to London that golden July morning there is nothing I will write.

The twenty-two miles took over five hours to cover; indeed it was nearer the sixth before my humble equipage rolled and rumbled over the cobble-stones of the London streets—streets filled with an aimless, awed crowd. My coachman, according to my orders, made his way with some difficulty to the entrance of Chiffinich's lodgings, near the river, a quiet back way little frequented by the public; and though the coach was more than once questioned by sentries I boldly said I had important business with the Keeper of the King's Cabinet, and they let me through. There was an air over everything as of tension just slackened, as of safety accomplished, a deed done; in fact, I was surprised to arrive at my destination with so much ease. I had been prepared for a far greater difficulty and was in the set, stony frame of mind in which, in my life then and my life now, I have got things done by unhesitatingly walking straight through everything and simply doing them.

At the modest half-hidden door I was on the step,

my great black cloak about me, my hood well over my face, but the ribbons loosened, before it was opened, and I saw with relief a servant once well known to me, a confidential man of Chiffinch's in old days. I simply asked to see his master, and was quite as simply denied.

"Watkin!" I said, and then threw back my hood so that he could see my face. He started and bowed hurriedly. "Take this to your master and tell him Madame Stuart is without," and into his hand I put a piece of paper on which I had written a line or two in the cypher Charles had given me. He did not even go through the form of asking me to wait while he went to make inquiries; he bowed deeply again and bade me enter. "Come back in two hours," I said in a firm clear voice to my coachman, and followed. We passed through passages dark even in this high summer at midday, and entered the familiar ante-room, the ante-room leading to that inner apartment with its enormous window overlooking the Thames, where half my life ago, it seemed, I had had my final interview with King Charles. "Madame, a seat," said the man; then paused for a moment. "Oh, *Madame!*" He looked at me, and was gone to fetch William Chiffinch.

I stood up. This was past bearing. To sit and wait in these very rooms—why, when last I passed that door in front of me, Charles had closed it behind me, and I, with my tears on my cheeks and his kiss on my mouth, his kind gay voice ringing in my ears—"My dear, dear cousin!" encouraging, consoling, laughing at my fears—had turned to Chiffinch with a sort of wild wonder and foreboding, shared, I knew, and all too well understood. "I cannot endure it," I said aloud, and the private door from Chiffinch's lodgings opened and he came in. The same dark, sharp face, the same lift of the eyebrows, the same

heavy black perriwig so like his master's[1]—nay, not his master now, for this man, like Ailesbury, was King James's servant.

He came forward without a word, took my hand, bent very low, kissed it, and, without letting it go, led me into the inner room. In his left hand he held my paper. We looked at each other in silence. There was everything to say, and nothing. Chiffinch, thank the gods, was a man who never wanted explanations. Besides, I was not there to explain. I looked at him and he at me. I spread my hands swiftly out and apart as if sweeping away—what did I not sweep? and spoke at last. "Will," I said, "I must see the King. I have a watch to keep this night, and I must have his permission. Take me to him."

I asked for nothing—I said I must have! He knew me, he knew what I meant, he knew the King, aye, he and I knew each other so well, and the King—the Kings we had served, and we needed telling nothing, did we? Besides, I had but one point to gain, and one thing more to do, and then, I would trouble James II and his servants no more.

"His Majesty dines, but he will be at liberty"—he glanced at the clock—"in a few minutes. He will be in his closet. I will take you there." No difficulties, no objections; James the inaccessible was to have me shown straight in to his most private sanctum without a word! The barriers were down, the sentries were removed, he was safe once more, the only King in England since ten o'clock that morning. . . . Chiffinch stood by the empty grate and I by the wide window.

On the floor between us, had I known it, Mon-

[1] Vide the Gorhambury portrait of Chiffinch.

mouth had knelt before James II at their last awful meeting. I knew it later, not then.

But it was not Will Chiffinch who was present as a living man in that room—he was a ghost beside Charles and his son, a reality, but a shadow in the presence of dead men far more alive, far more real to me.

A bell sounded.

Chiffinch never said another word; he came across the room and took my hand again, and led me through both the doors into the gallery, quietly, firmly, *exactly* (it is hard to describe) *as I wanted him to do;* and that, too, he understood. We paused before another familiar door, again, I was in an ante-room not empty this time, but tenanted by a page or so, and a couple of magnificent courtiers, one of whom was Lord Sunderland and the other Lorry Hyde, King James's brother-in-law, laughing together freely. They turned on seeing Chiffinch enter, and with him a woman! Chiffinch closed the outer door with perfect unconcern, handed me to a seat which I took without a word or sign, moved to the inner door, spoke to the page beside it, scratched with his private key, entered, and was shut in with his King. A familiar voice floated out as the door opened to admit the Keeper of the King's Closet and closed upon him; I sat by the table, my hood shading my face, my hands quiet in my lap, taking no more notice of the splendour of Sunderland or the fastidious modishness of the new Lord Rochester than if they had been the boy at the door. There was a pause; then his lordship, with well-bred insolence, said something just below his breath to his brother earl—Sunderland, who had been in correspondence with Monmouth, and whom Monmouth had promised should be his Prime Minister!—Lorry Hyde, Clarendon's second son, his secret faith pinned to the suc-

cession of his nieces, the Lady Mary and the Lady Anne—and I, in my deep mourning and enveloping hood, symbol of defeat and heartbreak, come to sue for one more favour.

The door opened, and out came—*Bentinck!*

For the first time that day my composure nearly failed me, the shock—though I might have expected to meet him; might have been almost certain of it, had I known, as I know now, the history of that last week—the shock was like a blow in the face. He too was laughing, more animated than I had ever seen him, with an appearance of immense relief in his whole atmosphere, all accounted for when I knew everything later. He advanced and Sunderland turned, with uplifted brows, to him as he came.

And I rose from where I sat, I put up a hand to the fastening of my cloak, threw back my hood, let the cloak itself fall from my shoulders, and fronted him. Sunderland, never to be surprised, bowed low, Rochester checked one of his usual oaths, Bentinck, stolid Dutchman trained in William's school as he was, turned scarlet all over his fair face, and with an obvious effort pulled himself together and took another step towards me, his lips parting to speak.

And I advanced too; I looked all three men straight in the eyes, each one separately, ending with Bentinck, and I walked through the group they made as if they had not been there, to meet Chiffinch at the open door of the King's cabinet.

A grey-haired woman in shabby black, friend of the traitor bastard now lying dead in the Tower, emblem of Stuart failure—yes! But they knew that I knew much, and they did not know how much, and they did not laugh as I went through them and in to the King as if I had been a queen. There is little that is laughable to read of just now in these pages, but I have laughed since!—and they

did not laugh then. I met Chiffinch's eyes as squarely, but with a difference, as he ushered me in, and the door was shut upon me.

James II was sitting at a great table placed sideways in the middle of the room, writing.

Opposite, between the windows, hung a mirror of tortoise-shell inlaid with gold, and, standing motionless by the door, waiting till the King should look up, I saw my reflection, my drawn, set face, yet with a colour in my cheeks and shining eyes, my white hair, plainly dressed, rolled back from my forehead uncurled and unadorned, my black gown simple to severity, my gloveless hands, hanging at my sides but with the fingers tightly clenched. So I stood.

He looked up, laid down his pen and made a movement to me to come forward. Charles would have been on his feet with a hand outstretched to be kissed in the fascinating Stuart way, but this King was not Charles. And I, what was I? The rebel—the known rebel who had been in league with the dead Pretender? If that was supposed to be my rôle I did not play it! I went forward, looked straight at the King as I had done at his courtiers in the ante-room, dropped my eyes, curtsied very deeply and very stiffly, rose again, and waited, still without a word.

"Well, Madame," said the harsh voice, that yet had a lingering note of triumph in its querulousness, "what is your business?"

"A favour, Your Majesty," I replied, and was silent again.

"A favour? you ask a favour—my pardon, I suppose? Seeing that you can do no further harm, it is my clemency that grants it. You are free."

"Sire," I replied, "I have been free since this morning."

Silence.

"You freed me then, Sire, when you removed your guard from my gates. But I have this to ask, freedom to go to a prison for to-night, and after that, Your Majesty, leave to go—and to return no more to trouble you and yours."

"You are pleased to speak in riddles"—the haughty lip curled, as I had seen William's do. Oh! they were alike, those two, uncle and nephew; James was not lucky in his nephews, as all History knows now.

"I think not, Sire. I want Your Majesty's permission to keep vigil by the dead to-night. Give me an order that I may watch the body of the Duke of Monmouth till daylight, and that Mr. Kneller may have access to-morrow after I have gone."

He swung round in his chair and seemed about to refuse. "Listen," I said. "In days to come, Sire, you may thank me for this. Let a woman who knew the dead well, and yet a woman who was not one of his women" (and here I smiled, and James smiled—two such utterly different smiles, and yet the only ones in the whole interview) "be able to bear witness that it was he. Let me commission Mr. Kneller to paint him lying there; another proof, Your Majesty."

He sat silent, puzzled. The slow mind, tenacious when once it grasped a fact, pondered these reasons, endeavoured, suspicious as ever, to find some hidden meaning in my wishes, warily waited, while the fine beautiful Stuart hand twisted the pen, laid it down, picked it up again. With another man I should then have struck another note, have touched, however slightly on all I had lost, and my powerlessness for future harm, have enlarged upon kingly prerogative, pity, perhaps; not with James! I remained perfectly still, and waited too.

He looked sharply at me and drew a piece of paper towards him, wrote swiftly in that large bold hand of his a few words, signed them, sanded them, made to push the paper across the table, but I never stirred. Then for the first time he rose, came towards me where I stood, held it out, and I took it. To this day I do not know if, for a moment the Royal hand was not outstretched for my kiss, since I was bowed to the floor in the same deep curtsey with which I had greeted him, and, as I rose, he was sounding a small bell on the table, and the door behind me opened to admit Chiffinch.

"Take this lady"—"this lady," of me, to Chiffinch! as if I had been a stranger[1]—"take this lady and see that she is conducted to the Tower and spends the night with James Scott's body." If he thought to read anything in my face, it was a blank to him.

There was a little pause; Chiffinch bowed without a word.

"Thank you, Sire," I said very low, "I am grateful to Your Majesty, you have been patient with my petition."

So he had; after all, so he had! I could say that truly, but I would have said it as a lie if need had been. He had won, he had beaten us who loved Monmouth to the dust, he was neither generous nor merciful, but he might have been entirely ungenerous and unmerciful to me, and he was not. He was a Stuart in his way—another side of me echoed the thoughts, the words, the actions of James II; he had had a hard life and bitter provocation, and we had laughed, all three of us, in the past, when he had gone seriously about the nation's business. He had made Britain a Navy, he established for

[1] It is almost impossible to realise that James II was also Madame Stuart's cousin!

ever the Church of England—we must thank him for that! albeit he did it backhandedly—he died a saint, having sacrificed his three crowns to his beliefs, and he suffered worse than Charles, or Monmouth, or Henrietta, or I! Peace to his ashes, wherever they may be. Who am I to judge King James?

I backed out of the presence. The ante-room was empty.

There were folk in the gallery outside, as the Keeper of the King's Closet and I passed out; Whitehall was stirring all that wild day, and there were many anxious to pay court to James, as there were to Anna Monmouth, waited upon by her friends to condole and congratulate in a breath, to whom "she modestly replied that she had bought that commendation dear." Heaven knows, it was the day of reckoning for most of us!

The crowd stood back as Chiffinch led me out once more, and looked as curiously at me as the three lords had done. What construction was put on my appearance there in deep mourning, obviously supported by Chiffinch, as obviously new from the King and carrying a Royal order of some sort, I cared not a snap of the fingers. The loser of the game has not lost his soul, and I, if ruined, if defeated, if utterly bereaved, left Whitehall for the last time carrying a high head, passed through those familiar passages thronged with the usual gathering, worn, shabby, with loosened hair and tear-stained cheeks, as steadily, aye, as insolently, as I had ever passed through a mob in my gayest days in silks and laces and jewels—and in my heart the wish that I were walking to Tower Hill as one had walked only that morning.

Mr. Chiffinch was among those men whose names History has branded with epithets unsuited to a less free-spoken age. To me he remains the old friend who helped me through that last dreadful day of my public life, for he took me straight, not to my coach, not to wait in his ante-room, but direct to his own private lodging. He put me into a big chair without a word, he called a servant, and before I knew what was happening a tray was brought with food and wine on it. "Since you have not dined, Madame, you must eat." No, I had not dined, I had forgotten! Had I breakfasted? it was too far back to remember. I shook my head, but he poured out a brimming glass. "Drink," he said quietly and commandingly, and I obeyed. Then I found I could eat; then he left me and sent a maid to me. I was to rest—no one would disturb me; the day-bed was heaped with soft cushions, warm water dashed with essence was forthcoming, my dusty dress brushed, my hair shaken out and swiftly re-dressed, and I meekly obeyed, awaking later from a dreamless slumber of several hours to find night fallen and Chiffinch in the doorway.

"I am excused from duty for the remainder of the day," he said in a matter-of-fact voice. "My barge is at the Privy Steps. Your coach will go to my stable for the night, and your man hath been told; he will attend at the Tower gates at day-break to convey you home. Mr. Kneller I have communicated with by messenger; he will come prepared to the Tower before you leave. He understands what will be required and will have all materials with him. Everything is arranged; Madame, your cloak"—he put it round me and drew the hood over my hair. Not till months afterwards did I wonder how, since James and I were alone in his cabinet, Will

Chiffinch had learnt all my wishes without any explanation!

To have a man to look after one again—to have all settled and arranged—to find that he, without a word, was going to spend his spare time in conveying me by the river to my destination, saving me the long, shaking journey in my hired vehicle, and possible difficulties among the city crowds, and on my arrival! I put my hand in his. "Oh, Will," I said. "How like——" and then for the first time my voice shook. He smiled that strange smile which left his black eyes solemn and infinitely sad. Once more I passed out, and found myself on the flight of open stone stairs where the evening air blew sweet off the great river, and we went aboard the small discreet barge, darkly painted and decorated, swift, adequate, unnoticeable; so like its owner.

From those stairs Monmouth had been taken to the Traitors' Gate. I thank Heaven, now, that though I knew all these things later, I did not know them at the time.

What I felt on entering the Tower can be said in one word—*nothing*. I was quite numb. There are times even now when I turn to stone, to outward view, and, as well, right to my heart. I have a dim recollection of our silent walk through the ways of that grim fortress to the entrance of the Bell Tower. I seem to recall swinging lanterns, and the red and gold and black of the Yeomen of the Guard's uniforms, an ancient door, more dark passages, stairs of rough stone, the entrance to a cell, the cell itself, a room bare of all things save a dull oil lamp hanging from the ceiling, that burned with a lurid smoky glare above a low couch in the centre of the floor, covered with a black velvet pall that swept the ground, but which was turned back to reveal a white

pillow, and on the pillow, the dark head of one asleep there.

From the time we set forth from the Privy Stairs, Chiffinch never said one word to me, nor I to him.

The books will tell you that tact was this man's trade; I can only say I have seen trades worse followed. The silence between us was broken only by his pausing, while I entered the room, to say somewhat to the two guards outside, who let us pass in a moment at the sight of His Majesty's permit; I heard the light crackle of the paper in my escort's hand. Then that business over, Chiffinch stood inside the door while I walked forward alone in the hot gloom.

There are times when acting becomes second nature. I had no part to play before William Chiffinch, but in all things there is, or should be, a decency, and he, whatever he thought or felt, was in his official position under King James. I, a humble petitioner whose last prayer had been granted, and the dead body before us that of a man who had paid the extreme penalty for High Treason. Besides, there was this—Chiffinch, who would see me no more, should at least remember me as a lady who had once been of his beloved King Charles's Court, who had faced his successor without flinching, and had had her way, and who now was come to watch out the night of her own free will, beside the bier of his enemy.

And tears, and lamentations, and even shuddering horror? Why, I did not want to cry or lament! We were beaten, we were down and done, he was dead; but why tears, and above all, why horror? Afraid of death? Death would be a friend to me, would he but come. Afraid of my James? Nay, I had felt no fear of that other James; and since all my heart was full only of love, and envy, and thank-

fulness that there was no more to endure, and that here was peace and quiet (for him I had never seen still, never known quiet!) what was there to do or to say? I stood beside the bier and looked down at him.

Oh, my most beautiful! Of all the lovely memories I had (and have) of you in your restless, splendid, gallant life, your light-hearted boyhood, your brave and glorious manhood, despite your follies and your sins, in your love at last, and always, always your friendship for me—of all those fair visions this one sets the finish and the crown upon my remembrances, this, of your exquisite dead face.

And as I stood still and gazed, Chiffinch came behind me and turned up the wick of the low lamp till the chamber was full of a glowing golden light. He never glanced at the bed; he came to my side, he suddenly dropped on one knee, took my shabby black skirts in his hand, kissed my gown, rose, and went without a word and the door was shut upon him.

"Everybody goes," I said to myself. "*Everybody goes, and nobody says good-bye.*"

This still figure had run so gaily from me, laughing over a shoulder, crying, "Await me! I must take leave of you; I cannot let you go like this!"

My dear heart, *I* had come to take leave of *you*, how else could I let you go?

I covered my head with my black draperies; I sat down at the foot of the bier on a low wooden stool; I put my elbow on my knee and rested my chin in my hand, and drew the all-enveloping folds of my thin, clinging mantle entirely over me from head to foot, and then let every muscle relax, slowly, slowly; and with it, all seemed to let go too, and the glimmering dusk swam into oblivion—I was out of it all for a little while.

Through that long night feet came and went—a woman of the people, a warder's daughter, I think, who wept a moment and was fetched away by the sentry, leaving a white rose on the black velvet; a clergyman once, I fancy; two officials talking in low tones; again, I surmise, a great lord whose step and voice I thought I knew, but I never stirred; and then, a rustle of silken skirts, and a woman's figure kneeling by the pillow, a black veil falling back from silvery-blonde hair — Eleanor Needham. But we never spoke, and to this day she does not know (I heard that afterwards) that mine was the shrouded watching figure at her dead lover's feet. I thought of her who had loved him and lost him, and of all the others but the one of whom I dared not then think, in the life at Whitehall through which his bright young presence had woven so golden a thread, of myself, who had loved him always, and had never had him to lose.

And now he was asleep, and none of us would ever wake him again.

The dawn came, blue and violet through the warm glow of the lamp. The room was empty then. I rose, and as the first shaft of July sun struck through the barred windows, extinguished the light, put aside my cloak, went back to the bier, and bent over King Monmouth. I pressed my lips to the heavy lids half hiding the dark eyes—once—twice.

"Sleep!" I said. "Never mind the dawn. You have done with our day."

And then came a knock at the door. "Mr. Kneller is without awaiting your orders, Madame."

"Let Mr. Kneller come in," I said. The little

clever self-important foreigner, once Monmouth's protégé, friend and painter of us all (I had sat to him twice or thrice myself), was beside me, very solemn, very subdued, followed by a servant carrying painting materials.

"Sir," I said, "will you do this for me? Make me a study of his Grace's head as he lies there—just that. You will have all the forenoon, I believe. Send it when finished to my house at St. Stephen's."

"Madame, it shall be done. May I ask—it is, perchance, a commission from . . . my lady Henrietta?"

"Man!" I said, sharply, in a tense whisper, "*she* does not know—anything," and I turned aside and stood looking out into the brilliant morning, quivering from head to foot, tearless.

"Madame Stuart, forgive me," said the painter in his broken English. "I should have known better. All yesterday I waited for a word from the Duchess—none came! This order is yours, then?"

"Aye, it's mine," I cried softly, feeling my lip curl as King James's had done. "It's mine! Not for the Duchess of Monmouth, not for a reminder to those who would rule England that they must prove their title first!" I cannot tell why I spoke thus. I only know that in after years Sir Godfrey Kneller, staunch upholder of the legitimacy of James II's last son, that king without a crown or a throne all his long weary life, remembered what I had said and asked me what made me say it then.

"Forgive me," I added. "Now I go, sir. Farewell. You will paint me a masterpiece, I can be sure."

"And fare you well, Madame," he replied with a low bow. "Later I trust we may meet again at Court; there will be many portraits——" he puffed

out his chest and strutted to the door to open it for me.

"Doubtless," I replied, "there will be many portraits. But not mine, sir; and if we meet again, it will not be in Whitehall."

The little man stood disconcerted at the door, the latch in his hand. His somewhat nervous and awed servant paused in his laying out of canvas, palette, and brushes. I turned to the dead.

No farewell to take there; nothing more left to say. Only a parting salute—my lowest of all low curtseys, down, down, on the rough stone floor with just the ghost of a smile on my lips at the astonishment I could feel (but not see) on the faces of the two men behind me.

"*Your Majesty's servant!*" I said; and so I left him for the last time.

At the entrance of the Bell Tower one of the Yeomen, evidently under orders to await me, took me through the flashing blue morning across the open square. Once I looked towards the low brown chapel where there was to be a funeral that afternoon, and then I followed my guide. At the portals my hireling was faithfully awaiting me. I was past all surprise by then; it seemed somehow quite natural that you, Madame Carey, whose whereabouts I did not know, with whom I had been unable to get in touch all the time King James's sentries were at my doors, should be seated within, holding the door half opened ready for me, the anxiety on your face sharp in the brilliant light. I believe I remembered to give a direction, unnecessary as it turned out, to the coachman, I hope I paused to thank the Yeoman, I am very certain I said no greeting to you! I stepped

into the coach and into your arms, and as we rolled under the lowering arch, I have just a remembrance of blue sky and blue ripples reflecting it on a gay river. Then all was dark at once—Nature is sometimes kind.

KNOWLEDGE

CHAPTER XXV

KNOWLEDGE

All the Latin I construe is "Amo—I love!"

BROWNING.

Amo.

MONMOUTH'S MOTTO.

You took me back to St. Stephen's without a word of explanation, invaluable, like Chiffinch, in those dread times when nothing matters but the Thing that Is; you stayed with me there for a week or more till I pulled myself fiercely, determinedly, together again. At first, lying in my curtained bed in the dark, I hoped I might die—in fact, I said "I *will die*"—and then over and over again my thoughts went back to Henrietta and I wondered if there were not a little more for me to do for Monmouth with her. After my first connected talk with you I was sure of it. You were perfectly admirable and adequate, my servants were always devoted to you. I slept "like drowned weed" after that long journey home, part of which I passed in fortunate insensibility; and in the waning of the ensuing Saturday you came and sat by my bedside, and let in the clear rose and silver light of a Hertfordshire summer evening.

"Open the curtains that I may once more see day," I murmured, quoting one of Charles's last sentences, and then I looked at you, sitting in the tall-backed wand-seated chair, that had stood at my bedside at Whitehall and which my visitors so often used.

"We used to live in one another's bedrooms,[1] I sometimes think! I remember how frequently my friends visited me when I was ill. There was one afternoon, when Charles sat there for two hours at a stretch, and James broke all laws of etiquette by perching himself at the foot of my bed, where he kicked the bed-rail till he had to be stopped, and entangled his sword in my embroidered quilt when he got up to go!"

Why I should have thought of that foolish little incident, and have spoken of it then, I cannot say; you took it all as a matter of course, and went on with your embroidery quite simply. I lay still after that and looked at you in your beautiful black corded silk dress, with a plain deep berthe of Venetian point in the French fashion, veiled with black and your hair, turned up from your forehead (like Anna Monmouth's in the portrait with her sons) enframed with a fine transparent black veil, the edges of which stood out slightly all round, the ends falling nearly to the hem of your skirts.

"Do you remember Charles once told us how well your nut-brown hair and my grey looked with black?" I said suddenly; "and he added that he must kill the Duke of York for the sake of being able to see us both in Court mourning! 'What will be the use of your looking your best when I'm dead and not there to see you?' he asked us. (What is the use, Sophia?) When the Duke of York dies, will you put on orange?" I inquired, with a certain grim viciousness.

You laid down your work and looked at me. "*Before then*," you said.

That came true enough. You were the wife of a

[1] Any lady, virtuous or not, received calls from gentlemen in bed; the history of the period is full of such incidents.

man who helped carry on the business of the country for Mary Stuart's sake, when King James left the Government in confusion, and the Army disbanded, and William dragged England somehow out of the pit she had digged for herself; but I never wore colours again—not orange for King William, since my blue for King Monmouth was never worn either; and by the time James was off the throne and William and his wife on it, I was out of the way of all affairs, stranded in my little backwater for good. Never again were sentries posted at the gates of a woman who had been dangerous because she knew too much!

I turned on my pillows and looked out of the window. "Is there any news out of Holland?" I said abruptly.

"I have heard of none," you answered, "and I had several letters this morning. No, there are none for you. Mr. Chiffinch sent a messenger down yesterday to ask how you did—the town is quiet, Judge Jeffreys goes west." We gazed at each other a moment and you went on. "Mr. Chiffinch—I held back his messenger—I wrote to him. I asked him to let us have news of Lady Wentworth, I used the figure in your cypher; was I wrong?"

"Of course you were right, but I had hoped for news ere this," I returned, restlessly moving in my bed. "My lord Bruce—I was glad he was not in waiting when I saw his Highness, though I thought he would have written."

"He is Lord Ailesbury now," you replied. "His father has just died, and at the same time his young son, and he is in great trouble. He was excused from his term of waiting; that is why you did not see him. I did."

"*You?*" I said.

"Yes. I was in London. Are you strong enough

to hear my story now, or shall we wait? There is no haste." You picked up your frame again and filled a needle with silk.

"Tell me," I answered. "I can bear anything. You were in the town, then, when I was a prisoner here?"

"For three days," you said. "I went up on purpose, as soon as I heard of—of Sedgemoor fight. I tried to see the King and he denied himself to me. Then I would have made a further attempt, but Lord Bruce came to our lodgings and told both my husband and me that all was of no avail. I do not suppose King James would have listened to me," you added thoughtfully, "but I was not going to let his Grace die without saying one word. Anyhow, it had to remain unsaid. But dear kind Bruce, who only paused at our house to bring me the message that it was a hopeless attempt, and worse than hopeless, for me to petition His Majesty, before he hurried back to Ailesbury and his dying father, gave me one piece of news. 'If you wish it, Madame Carey,' he said, 'I can tell you this. The King has given permission for the Duke to have admitted to him any who may press for it; any for whom he may send. I can tell you this, too, though I have not seen him—I cannot—I beheld him at Whitehall Steps being brought to the Tower——,' and here he had to wait for a while before he could go on. 'I can tell you this: his Grace has been informed that Madame Stuart cannot leave St. Stephen's' "; I made a swift movement, and you added: " 'because the King has set a guard on her house. But you could gain access to the Duke, I think, Madame. He is to die on Wednesday'—this happened late on the Monday evening—'I believe it could be done if you intended it.' I said I would go."

As you talked, in a calm matter-of-fact voice, you

went on with your work. I made a little sign for you to continue.

"My husband raised no objections. The next morning he himself went down to the Tower. He was told that my name had been sent up to the Duke of Monmouth, and that he begged that I would come that night about eight. He had seen Queen Catherine" (I drew a long sobbing breath as you said that), "but privily; it must not be published. He had also seen Lord Annandale, and he hoped to see Lord Dover, but he is not in town. 'Therefore, at eight o'clock, Madame Carey will be expected,' was the message my husband brought back. So I went, my dear, for you."

"For me?" I said. "I might have known! But I knew nothing: only that the Duke of York would never let me see him alive."

"The Duke of York?" you asked, looking steadily at me. "But you must face it; there is no Duke of York now."

"There was no Duke of Monmouth when you went to the Tower," I retorted with a bitter little laugh. "You went to see James Scott, as I did—after. And there is no King James now—never for me. But call him so if you will."

That was the only cruel word I said to you, I think, but I was hurt almost to death, and, after all, you understood everything and minded nothing of what I said or did then. And four years after I reminded you, when William was on the throne, and asked you whether or no there were a King James, not bitterly, not unkindly, for there was no King at all for me after Monmouth died, neither James who killed him, nor William, who drove James into exile, nor James's son, whom the world dubbed a bastard as he had dubbed his brother's son James! That too you knew, and made allowance for.

Then I laughed and said, "I am quibbling; I have spoken with the Stuart who now wears the English crown, I have paid him due reverence, I have called him 'Your Majesty.' Words, forms, ceremonies, let them go. I am done with them—and so is King Monmouth. Tell me of him, Sophia."

"There is not much to tell," you said; the light sank slowly, gleaming translucent from the northwest like amber strewn with coral clouds across the sky above the town; and you laid down your embroidery. "I knew not how I should find him—they told many dreadful tales—I was prepared. . . ."

"Aye," I said, "prepared for what you did not find! How like James. And——?"

"And he was calm and perfectly composed, nay, he was even gay. He laughed a little, quite happily, as I was shown in. 'My lady, my dear lady,' he said, and kissed both my hands and held them, and drew me down to a seat by a table, sitting down himself, keeping hold of my hands still. 'Ah,' he said, 'so I have friends yet. You come from my cousin?'

"'Your Majesty,' I replied," (here I turned my face a little away from the sunset with a fleeting smile), "'Your Majesty, your cousin does not know that I come. I could not meet her; we are kept apart, and she is under lock and key at her house, but what does that matter? We understand each other—yes, I am come from her.'

"'Under lock and key,' he echoed. 'Like me, Madame. Ah, she and I understand each other too. We have always been friends, have we not, Mistress Carey? You and she, and she and I; and now she is going to lose one of her friends, but she will keep the other, you will never fail her! You are not a Royal Stuart. We fail our friends, I think, sometimes; but most of all we fail ourselves.'

"Here I cried; I did not mean to," you told me, "but I could not help it, and he let one hand go, but held the other in both of his. 'There, there,' he said to me, as if he were speaking to a child. 'You weep, Her Majesty Queen Catherine wept—there is nothing to weep for. I have been mad and am sane again. Do you know why? I have been mad—mad with the thought of the woman I love, of my child that she was to bear. Now I know that for love of me she kept me in ignorance—Madame, there is to be no child. And she will come after me soon; it will only be a little separation after all,' and he smiled at me again. 'Why, now I can die, can I not? For think, Madame, think! Had I won, had I seated myself on my uncle's throne, there should I have sat, alone, while she went away, died, and left me, and now . . . ! So you see there is no need for tears. How do I know this? Can you and my cousin keep a secret, Madame? I endanger no more thrones!' and again he smiled. 'M. Bentinck was here but an hour agone. He had a good deal to say. He knew I had a good deal to say if I cared to say it. I was wild for life—*wild*—and he knew it. But he brought me a cypher letter from the Princess of Orange. She has seen my love, she will go to her and tell her . . . after to-morrow. Never was a kinder letter written, Madame; it has changed everything for me—everything, and M. Bentinck could not understand why! But you—you know, and the Lady Mary knew, and so she wrote as she did, privately; not even the Prince was aware that she had written. And now *I* know all. Do you remember what my motto is? "Amo—I love," that is the extent of my Latin. I had a little more once, had I not? "Jacobus dux Monumet fidei et libertates defensor"—now Faith and Liberty must look to the present King to defend them, the Re-

formed Faith, my lady, the liberties of the English people!'—and here, I admit," you said, "this was so like the old Monmouth that it was impossible not to laugh!"

"I know, I know," I replied, nodding.

" 'The Princess told me the truth. Henrietta is dying, Henrietta my dearing,'[1] he lingered over the caressing phrase. 'Her Highness has known it long, and I remember how my cousin Charlotte looked at me when we parted in Holland. I think she guessed then—and my eyes were holden. Now bid me a brave good-bye, remembering I go gladly, and take Charlotte this from me, telling her all I have told you, asking of her one last favour, that if my Lady Wentworth lives to return here, she will see her and speed her on her way to me. For I know now that nothing counts but love! I lose England, I lose life, but I have love for all eternity. I have learnt that late, but not too late, Madame Carey. The gods be kinder to you, Mistress, than they usually are to those who are kind to the Stuarts,' and he put a little packet into my hand and closed my fingers over it, and then kissed my shut fingers. 'So I seal my despatch!' he smiled, and I came away."

"Where is it?" I whispered, sitting up in bed. The last rays of the dying glory without made a reflected light in the room. You took from your dress a small flat packet folded in paper. I opened it, and out upon the white sheet fell two curls, one silky-fine, deep brown with a hint of gold and auburn in the waves; and, another, dense black, wiry, shot with many threads of white.

" 'Tell her,' he said to me," I heard your voice saying, 'it's always unlucky to keep hair; and so,

[1] Monmouth spells it thus in his pocket-book.

it seems, it is to keep faith. But she's a Stuart too, and she knows.' "

Why yes, I suppose I know! Old Bacon of Verulam sat at Gorhambury and wrote, "Knowledge is power."

"Knowledge is love," I write at St. Stephen's by St. Albans!

FROM ST. STEPHEN'S TO ST. ALBANS

CHAPTER XXVI

FROM ST. STEPHEN'S TO ST. ALBANS

Mironton, Mironton, Mirontaine!

THERE remained now but one thing for me to do, to get back my strength and again wait. If Henrietta should return to England, I must be ready for her—a sacred order. How to get news of her?—that was my next trouble. Ordinary letters were useless. William of Orange controlled the packet service and, I believed, the mails. I had refused Bentinck recognition in King James's ante-chamber; no hope from the Dutch Court, therefore! And anyhow, I knew what the Dutch Court was set on—I had long known it; Charles had known it years before he died; though Mary of Orange had risked all to write in secret to Bentinck that Monmouth might die gladly. (How like a woman to understand, and to risk so much for Monmouth while yet wholeheartedly William's! How like Bentinck to fail to see her point! How—but this train of thought took me no farther.) There was no possibility of writing to Philadelphia for news of her daughter in cypher; she would not understand it, I believed. Was Henrietta herself in a fit state to write to, even if I could get a letter through? Then, as I pondered, came a rumour—old Lady Wentworth was returning to England, to Toddington, alone; had returned even. She had left her daughter, still very ill, with her sister

Aletta Quirinson, and Henrietta was to follow later; for the present she and her mother were best apart—so ran the reports in St. Albans.

Poor daughter, yes, and poor mother, I thought of Philadelphia, her boundless ambition, her hopes, the manner in which her fiery nature had at last bent itself to the inevitable, her pawned jewels, her scheming on Monmouth's behalf, her great dreams—and her awakening. And of Anna, his wife, who had dreamed—and awakened. Henrietta alone, I think, dreamed not at all. Always and ever she had faced realities, clear-eyed. Life, her life and his; death, his death and hers. Love, their love, that one thing immortal! I bowed my head before it; yet I too had my own love, a poor thing, a pale flame burning beside theirs; but never say that a woman can only love men as lovers. My two Kings had been all my life to me.

Again it was Ailesbury who gave me news. He did not call, he wrote. The days were darkening into late September, the foxy-brown of the beeches burnt along the Verulam Woods. St. Albans, like a continental city, showed red and brown, cream and grey beyond my high walls. Then Ailesbury's letter came to me.

"She is returning, I know this for truth. She has written to nobody, but one has sent me word. She will pass your gates to-morrow. Should the packet be delayed it will not be till dark, but it may be earlier. Madame, I think you will wish to know this." Our faithful Ailesbury!

The packet may have been late, or the heavy rains of the past and gone summer have rendered the roads worse than usual, it was after dark before I heard the roll of wheels, the trotting of an escort, and a travelling coach and its accompaniment approached my gate. I stood there wrapped in my

cloak, my woman with a lantern close behind me. The traveller, if she cared to pause, or if she wished to go straight on, should at least see me waiting for her. And she did stop. The great coach came creaking and rolling to a standstill, the mounted servants pulled up, one swung himself off his horse and opened the door, and, as I went forward, the wavering rays of the light behind me fell on the fair face I had last seen among the tulips and spring foliage of a Dutch garden.

"Ah, Madame Stuart, this is welcome indeed," she said, and stretched out her hands to me. I was on the step of the coach, I held her hands (wondering as I took them if they would fade into nothingness at my touch, so fragile, so burning were they). I kissed her and looked at her in silence, wordless, for it was she who spoke, with calmness, almost with gaiety. The long Wentworth eyes seemed to fill her whole face, the brilliant colour showed on cheeks always pale for all their rouge at Whitehall, the serious mouth smiled.

"So I come back!" she said; "and so I find you waiting, as I might have known. Nay, my kind dear friend, I will not stay; I must reach Toddington to-night, and it grows late. But promise me this —will you hold yourself in readiness to come and see me—before long? I have things to do, and much to put in order, and there are those whom I must talk with, and work that I must finish; afterwards I shall rest. And I want you to come to my home before I leave it. Madame Carey—yes, I have just seen her, did you not know?—she has told me of James's wish. Now I tell you of mine: I want you!" She spoke quite easily and simply, exactly (as I realised at the moment) as Monmouth had spoken to you in the Tower; she kissed me again, she pressed my hands. "Go in now," she said, as if she

were taking care of me. "You are chilled, you must have been waiting long; I will write."

She laughed softly, but she fell back with a gasp, and I realised that her maid had been holding her up all the time, and now drew her back among the cushions in the great coach.

"Go within. I promise—I will send for you. I have something to give you. Adieu, Madame, we shall meet again," and the travelling carriage and its escort passed on into the dusk out of the ring of light shed by my lantern.

"She will be travelling most of the night," I said half to myself as I went up the path, and my woman overheard me.

"Yes, Madame, but I do not think milady will care. She does not look as if night or day differed much for her, does she? Death is in her face."

"Aye, it is," I said. "But death has been there long. She is happier now. When last I saw her she feared she would have to die and leave—His Majesty. Now she hath but to follow him, and she is simply glad."

"What else?" said my woman, bolting the front door behind us both as we stood once more in the hall. I looked at her, dimly surprised, but her stern, plain, middle-aged face was turned from me, and her shoulders shook in the yellow flickering light from the floor where the lantern had been set.

"Oh, *James!*" I said to myself. "Another woman who loved you. When shall I ever come to the end of the list of women who love you?"

I do not know; I doubt if, even in this life, I have come to the end of it yet!

Henrietta had something to give me? Yes, and I had something for her, but there had been delays.

Master Kneller had been kept very busy, and, as I read between the lines, portraits of dead attainted dukes painted for presumably penniless, and certainly disgraced, ladies of the past Court, did not get finished before other more important commissions! But I showed no impatience, for I knew as well as he that he owed his whole career as Court portrait-painter to Monmouth, and I was certain I should get my picture in time; meanwhile, I naturally saved my pence to pay for it! And three weeks after Henrietta had passed my gate there came a carrier to me, bringing a letter, announcing that the portrait was on its way by public coach to St. Albans, and would arrive at the George the following morning. So I walked into the town to meet it, one of my farm hands bringing up the rear with a cart to carry it back.

Up the steep slope of Fishpool Street, beyond the immemorial arch and the long hog's-back of the Abbey nave, you go to the George Inn. It had an air of hoary antiquity in that life of mine, founded, as it was, in 1401. (The newer building on the same site and under the same name prospers to-day.) It was a house of call well known to Monmouth, my Lord Grey, and the rest, on their flying visits—you have but to read Grey's *Narrative* now, to see how frequently they were in the town, apart from the visits of the former to the neighbouring parish of St. Stephen's! Many a time had their light travelling coaches, so different from the old family equipages and lumbering public vehicles, stood in the yard surrounded by interested spectators, their steaming horses being unharnessed and led away to make room for fresher teams, ostlers bustling, chambermaids giggling at upper windows at the fine gentlemen and their servants below—and as I, modestly on foot and in my deep mourning, turned into the

courtyard, my heart gave a leap and then stopped, for a moment, to see just such another carriage. I paused in the twilight of the archway. My host, who was wont to bow as near the ground as his well-filled waistcoat would permit to my lord or his Grace in the past, who had always supplied me with what hirelings I required for my journeys to London, came swiftly out of the small door under the arch and pushed rudely past me. I had not yet learned that to be the friend of his Grace my Lord General alive and in favour with King Charles, was not the same thing as to be James Scott's discredited follower! —but I was learning. I drew a long breath, clenched my hands hard inside my cloak, and walked into the yard after him.

The crowd, which had parted to let the landlord hurry through, admitted me in his wake. I saw him bowing double, as of old, to a splendidly dressed gentleman standing by the coach door, who was pointing out something amiss with the near fore wheel, and giving orders as to its repair (one ran to fetch a wheelwright as I went in), and explaining that he must return that day on urgent affairs, and that his own house being for the time closed, he had stopped at the George either to have the damage righted or to hire a fresh conveyance back to London; and as he spoke, he turned and caught sight of me.

Across the bent back of the landlord, Lord Churchill and I met face to face.

With the whirligig of events that had caught such obscure non-combatants as myself in the cogs of its machinery, John Churchill, friend of Monmouth, comrade-in-arms, presented by him to Charles as the saviour of his life after the taking of Maestricht, was now, by a turn of Fortune's wheel, one of the victorious army who had fought against him at Sedgemoor, commanding, under Feversham, the cavalry

with the Duke of Grafton. Already he showed signs of that military genius that raised him later to a pinnacle of fame o'ertopped by no great English Captain before or since, and that inherent falseness that has for ever blackened the character of one of the handsomest and most charming men, faithful and adoring husbands, devoted fathers, and pleasing courtiers. He is for ever England's glory and her shame—traitor, like Sunderland, to one, two, three consecutive kings, and yet undeniably and immortally ranked among the men who made this country what she is—and shall ever be.

Our host, only too anxious to show his haste to carry out the great man's orders, bowed again, and backed away in ridiculous repetition of his old manner to Monmouth, wheeled, and brushed hurriedly by me, obviously blind by intention to my presence, to get further help for the work on hand. A sweet, rather high-pitched, infinitely affected but equally commanding voice spoke and arrested his unmannerly career.

"Look where you go, my man," said Lord Churchill. "You need not knock down Madame Stuart to get me a new wheel!" and he came forward, his hat in one hand, holding out the other, back uppermost, for me to give him mine to kiss. He had rebuked an insult to me, he stood before me, charming, smiling, self-possessed as usual; by not one sign did he show surprise that my hands remained locked under the folds of my cloak, nor that, as I curtsied, there was no answering smile on my face.

"Can I help you, Madame?" he asked. "These good folk forget their manners, it seems."

The nonplussed and stammering landlord had paused behind me, to blurt out excuses and ask for orders. I bowed, silently still, to Lord Churchill. "The public

coach has brought me somewhat," I said coldly to the landlord. "My man and a cart are without; let the package be given him without delay." Then I spoke to his lordship.

"Sir, the matter of your wheel is urgent, I will not interrupt you further," and I turned to go.

But the gay gallant figure and the chestnut curls were beside me, spurs rang upon the cobbles, and the sweet voice said in my ear: "Mistress, I am proceeding on foot to my house; I have papers to go through, and some orders to give my people while this cursed wheel is mending, and I would have a word with you. You are walking?—allow me to escort you thus far," and I went out of the inn courtyard with John Churchill, composed, serene, magnificent in the bravery of his cavalry uniform, beside me.

"Madame," he said softly and swiftly, "you condemn me for the part I have played of late."

"My lord," I replied, "I said no word. The losing side has to take its beating—and more than its beating—in silence. Also I thank you for your courtesy. A friend of the late Duke has (it would seem) become invisible in the eyes of the lesser folk hereabouts, but why should I blame them? I do not. Nor do I condemn you."

"No, Madame," he answered me, "I know you do not. Remember I am a soldier; I was under orders. A soldier has to obey, he is a servant of the king——"

"Oh, aye, I know," I said wearily, "there are no ties of friendship for a king's servants. My Lord Ailesbury says the same. I wonder, my lord, how it would be had the day gone otherwise, had you and your king and your soldier-hood and your service been at *our* orders?"

The slow cold anger of the Scot flamed steadily, resistlessly up in me. I thought of the stricken field of

the King's Sedgemoor and the bloody after-crop of Judge Jeffrey's reaping, tales of which crept back to me day by day, and I did not try to hide my thoughts, for I feared no servant of James II, nor did I ever.

"Under another king, Lord Churchill!" I said, as we went together down the abrupt slope of the hill of the Holy Well, "another king to serve, another king to fight for, and you would say the same?"

Perhaps that was a truer word spoken than I knew at the time, perhaps the shot went deeper than I thought, for all the fine composure outwardly unruffled. Four years later, how well I remembered that talk of ours! We paused at the gates of his house, and the hill I had yet to ascend rose before me; he smiled again and took off the plumed hat once more and stood bareheaded and brilliantly good-looking in the October sunshine.

"And which king, Madame, if one may ask, claims your allegiance now?"

"Sir," I said to him, "you are a man and a soldier and a public servant. *You* must always have a Sovereign to serve; you have taught me that a woman may be in happier case, she need only think of her country!"

"Ah?" he questioned, with the same light unruffled smile, "doubtless that simplifies matters. Kings complicate a man's life, Madame Stuart; your heart pulls one way, your religion another, your Sovereign gives you orders which point in a third direction, your country needs your presence (so you think) in a fourth. What is a man to do?" He laughed.

"There is one thing he will not do if he be wise," I said, "and that is—to ask a woman what course he should take."

The steel-blue waters of the little Ver, strewn with yellowing leaves, ran under the bridge by which

we stood. A gust shook the high trees lining my road uphill, and scattered a gleaming shower of gold upon us.

"So a man will ask but one thing, Madame," said John Churchill, "your kind hand in token of forgiveness," and his own was outstretched once more for me to lay mine upon it. "His late Majesty King Charles would have said——"

That was the one mistake he made—the fatal error, for all his courtier-like readiness, patience, and adroitness. I swung round upon my heel suddenly at the word, and let go my icy anger.

"His late Majesty King Charles," I repeated slowly and clearly, "would have said, 'I forgive you, for you do it for your bread!' I'll say that too, my lord. There's my forgiveness—with King Charles's!" and I turned and went up the hill to my home without another sign.

In my parlour, a great case of rough boards had been carefully opened; against the couch, catching the last rays of the sun, leant a splendid golden frame enclosing the painting which I had prophesied would be Kneller's masterpiece. I stood and looked down at the presentment of the dead face as I had looked at the original in the Tower under the golden light of the hanging lamp.

"You have the rights of it by now, at any rate," I said. "Whether it's orders from your heart or your conscience or your king or your country, and whether you give commands or obey them. You gave me one last order and I have to carry that out! afterwards, there will be nobody left for me to obey. I may find life simpler than doth Lord Churchill!"

Then, as I ceased speaking, there swept over me the sea of my great loneliness, the recollection of all

I had had and all I had lost. And yet I was not thinking of myself, but of the horror of this warm young life cut off deliberately in cold blood, this death that was meant to be a public shame, man's vengeance upon man, Stuart's vengeance on Stuart! Down to the floor I went beside the portrait, on my knees, sinking ever lower, my head resting against the cornice of the frame, my hands (that the future Duke of Marlborough had been denied) covering my face—and then came the tears, till I was blind and giddy and faint. To die—how unbearably hard! To live—how unbearably harder! It was not till I had shed every tear I had left, and had risen and dried my eyes and dragged back by force of will some semblance of self-control, that the other spirit of unquenchable laughter rose again in my breast.

"It would not seem," I said to myself, "that the Stuarts have much to be glad of concerning life or death. But oh, my dear, we had some brave times, and we'll have more yet. Dead—you and His Majesty, my two Kings? Not half so dead as I am now, or as I hope to be before very many years are over."

Meantime there was life to be faced with nobody in it left to obey, and I found it simpler than did Lord Churchill.

Oh, without doubt I did, but I never did anything for my country that counts; and Marlborough, for all his faults, did as much as any man has ever done, I think.

FROM TODDINGTON TO THE END

CHAPTER XXVII

FROM TODDINGTON TO THE END

Only a moment more and we shall meet.
  The white death-chamber fades to dying eyes,
Far off, as sounds come from a distant street,
  Are whispered questions, and half-heard replies.
And faint and far the faces that are near,
  And dulled the muffled footsteps on the floor—
The darkness closes—Soul, have thou no fear,
    Only a moment more!

I WAITED very long, it seemed to me, for Henrietta Wentworth's summons to Toddington, and it did not come.

The browns and blues and gold lights of October died out in rain and wind, and a long weary winter set in early. The roads were almost impassable. Finely as the old Romans made the Watling Street, that famous highway was in none too good a condition then at several points, and the ascending road from Dunstable to Toddington, where one quits the Watling Street and goes across (and up) country to the right for several miles, was in shocking repair. Toddington was accustomed to being almost cut off from the rest of the world during the winter months of the seventeenth century. I waited with what patience I could muster, but I longed to go and take with me Kneller's picture, and there was a haunting fear in my heart that I might wait too long. Was she too ill to write? What was her mother's attitude? What——? I went over a string of questions daily and found no reply to any of

them. Reports sometimes reached me; I heard by letter from London of the visit of that bishop to Toddington whose duty it was to hand over something Monmouth had left in his charge for Lady Wentworth; that he had been unwilling to go, but that the King had commanded it. Even then I wondered if the King had insisted merely because the bishop was reluctant! or had he after all a feeling that it was her right to have anything thus left for her by her unfortunate lover? Again I could not answer.

I heard naught of Anna Monmouth, but I wanted to hear naught. The latest intelligence I had received was of the release of her two sons from the Tower in November, and that the little daughter had died there a month after her father—so much and no more. The *London Gazette* was filled with "loyal addresses," officialdom incarnate, hardly a word of real news. Life limped by, trailing broken wings in the mud.

And then, one day there came a letter from Lady Wentworth.

It was short and shakily written, but it contained what I wanted, an invitation to visit her. She had been very ill, she said, but was now better. Her mother, Lady Philadelphia, was wearied with nursing and was going up to town for a short visit and to see her lawyers. "We shall therefore be free," the letter concluded, a brief but pregnant sentence. I had been wondering how I should deal with Philadelphia, if she formed the third person at our interview, and I found myself unable to get rid of her in her own house! I think, too, that her daughter had felt the same, and had waited for her absence to ask me to come to her.

The roads were impossible for hired vehicles, but Henrietta informed me that their own great travel-

ling coach would fetch me on its return from taking her mother to London; she also promised that it should bring me back. I was to have no trouble of any kind; she would arrange everything, and—again—we should be free.

I sat with her letter on my lap and looked long out of the window. Had we ever been free before, in all our lives, she and I? A woman owns a master or is her own mistress. Why, perhaps, now we had that much freedom! I turned from the window and glanced up at the beautiful picture that hung opposite. I had said my good-bye to him, and now, as I knew perfectly well, I was going to say my good-bye to her.

I had many portraits of James. I had been allowed by his father to have a fine copy made of the Cooper miniature at Windsor; I had an exquisite head (much resembling the "School of John Riley" in the National Portrait Gallery to-day); I owned two or three studies by Sir Peter—one of a laughing mischievous boy of sixteen or seventeen; I had several prints, including both the Blootelings. But *this* was only mine till I could give it to her, and send it I would not; indeed, I found it very hard to face parting with it at all. But she had the right—why, who else? And this was utterly mine. No copy of a Royal collection's work of art, no engraving from a picture on the Duchess of Monmouth's walls! but mine—mine, as he was Henrietta's, who was giving her life for love of him. What had I given for him?—I, who seemed to have done nothing else but give.

I wonder why we cared!—just those few of us who worshipped him. There were not so very many of us, but we all loved James with something of the love that his father had had for him, I think; and he—oh! but he had loved us all in his way, or a

dozen different ways, yet all *his* way! And Henrietta? There was no question about his absolute adoration of her. "He loved her; he had given her his best, and possibly it was not his fault that his best was not better."

I lifted the picture down; my maid and I packed it carefully for its journey. Three days later the Wentworth coach stopped once more at my gates to carry me to Toddington.

Frost had succeeded damp and wind, a brilliant red sun hung like a round scarlet lamp in an opalescent sky. The journey, which in summer weather should have been accomplished in a few hours, took me nearly a whole day. I went alone with my picture —I did not even take my woman—a modest valise contained all my gear; that, and the case holding the portrait, were my sole impedimenta, "my night-bag," as I thought, and smiled over Charles's retort to Clarendon that he counted fifty horse as part of it. Mine was more restricted, at any rate, but the Wentworth servants took great care of me. There were warm cloths in the coach, and one of the escort (for a man rode on either side and another behind) produced a spare cloak, a big warm thing of lambs' fleeces in case I were chilled.

So we rolled along the straight Roman street, so we climbed the upland country, so we turned downward into the little deep-set valley where Toddington Place stood crumbling to decay among its fishponds and woods, and so I saw Henrietta once more, knowing I should see her no more at all.

I admit I was afraid of that meeting.

The strain of the past year had shaken me badly, I knew I should find a dying woman, and the whole visit might spell unrelieved tragedy. Never was I more surprised—I, who thought myself past all surprising. It was already dark, but when I had been

dispossessed of my wraps and conducted across the great hall and to that wing that she and Monmouth had occupied for those happy five months in 1683, I found a warm, brightly lit parlour; and Henrietta, if she could not rise, yet held out both arms to me from where she lay propped up with cushions on the day-bed by the fire, her face thin to emaciation, and absolutely "all eyes," brilliantly flushed, and with a lovely smile of greeting. She never said a word; she just held out her arms like a child. I knelt beside her, and—I confess it—it was I who wept on her shoulder and she who comforted me.

"Oh, you poor thing," she said to me very softly, "who have to go on living!" and then she laughed and stroked my hair—so unlike her old self: she was never given to caresses or many smiles, or kisses, or that cheap commerce between women friends. But on the edge of death barriers break down, I think. My fair, tall gracious Henrietta Wentworth, indeed, indeed you were very nearly free!

I was taken away by her women to rest, to change my dress, but I came down again and had my supper in her room and we talked for a while. "To-morrow morning we will go out," she said. "Oh yes, I go out! I have a sort of litter and two of my men carry me, and I travel my gardens and my woods, and I look at the water and the grass, and watch, every day, the sap rising and the buds growing greener. You shall walk beside me if it will not weary you, and see once more my old home. Madame, when one dies it is hard to leave one's home behind. But that is my punishment. I have failed Toddington. I was a queen who gave up her throne. I leave no heir; here we end, we Wentworths! My little son is safe in Paris, safe and well. No, my

dear, I shall never see him again. I have said my farewell to him and put it behind me. That is over; he is in good hands; he will bear another name,[1] his future is provided for. I have nothing more to suffer except a few more weeks of life. And if I have borne—what I have borne, those will be bearable!" She laughed again. "Don't pity me, don't be sorry, don't be sad. All is for the best, my friend, all! I would have nothing changed, *for it might change one thing.*"

She looked into the glowing coals. "Meanwhile, as it is—it is as it was. I speak in parables; forgive me. You see, I love him. I loved him from the very beginning; no, not when I went to Court, I saw him first at his governor's, my kinsman, Lord Crofts, when I was a girl of fifteen. I loved him from the very first moment I ever saw him. Not (you understand me?) for his character, his gifts, his capabilities—oh, there was so much latent!—nor for his beauty. He was the most beautiful person I have ever seen."

(I put both my hands silently over my eyes for a moment—my heart knows he was.)

"Nor for his love for me. I did not love him for what he could do or be; I loved *him*—just that. These things are so. They come upon us, they fall almost like a stroke. When my love came to me I felt as if a great hand were suddenly laid on me, hard, never to be lifted again. It was not a burden, it was my whole life, and the meaning of everything. For years and years he never cared. He had his wife the Duchess, he loved Eleanor Needham, Lady Betty Felton, Mrs. Kirke, Mrs. Waller, a dozen more. Loved them? of course he did. I am the

[1] Smyth-Stuart. His descendants are believed to live in America to this day, but all efforts to trace them have failed.

last person to deny it! People think that we women who only love one in all our lives cannot understand those who love many—I do. He was very fond of the Duchess till she spoilt it. She was cleverer than any of us, Madame, but she was a fool in dealing with her husband. She had his love once and she threw it away. The others?—they had it and then . . . they had it not. And they were all more loveable than she, and I think they all loved him better, except Mrs. Kirke, and she was base—vile to the very marrow of her bones. But she was intensely attractive—ah! we both knew her, did not we? and we both understand. The rest, they did their best, I think. I stood aside. At first I hated you because I feared you. You knew it; I saw that! You were only about five years older then than I am now. You were still so girlish in your ways, still pretty, and he always trusted you (he trusted so few people all his life). I was *afraid.* Then, later, I could not understand when you seemed willing to help him in his pursuit of me. You had, if anything, held him back from the other——"

"Yes," I said below my breath, "but you were you, and they were the others, and I knew it at once."

She smiled. "Perhaps. But I was bewildered. His Majesty . . . and Monmouth was pressing me all the time, though so carefully that only you and the King saw, not even poor Bruce, my kind friend always. Kind still, Madame; I have one or two friends left, perfect friends. What can any one want more?"

She paused. "There is nothing I want now save God's forgiveness, and I believe, with King Charles and James, that I shall receive it. Ah, we were most wicked, Madame, all of us! But you have seen the old priest Hudleston, I know, and he has told

you of the King's death—his terrible sufferings of mind and body—and his perfect repentance. On the scaffold," the steady voice went on, "my James committed himself to the mercy of God in sure and certain hope. And in that hope I die! They two believed that they would win Heaven, Madame Stuart, and with them I dare to believe. The world will judge us—and rightly—by our sinful lives, but after our deaths, God Whom we have wronged beyond *human* pardon, will give us His Divine."

I knelt by her side and hid my face, my lips against her hair.

"To me, too," I whispered, "to me, too . . . !"

So I have hoped, so I have trusted, all through the interminable years of the grey later life which is *my* expiation.

A little while after her woman came in and said the portrait was unpacked, would milady see it? I was nervous, I feared, knowing how marvellously it was painted, that it might break down what I still thought her miraculous self-control. She saw the dread in my face.

"Oh no!" she cried, as if in answer to my thoughts. "Bring it in—stay, set it in my chamber, and then bid them carry me up to bed. Will you come with me?" as I made to bid her good-night, and draw back. "I want you to come. You don't understand yet!" The smile lit up the shining eyes.

"I begin to," I replied, and followed her men-servants as they carried her to her room.

The portrait was set where it could be seen from her bed, glowing under the light of a great oil-lamp, exactly as I had seen him lying last, but it was I who caught my breath, and my eyes that filled with

tears. She looked at it long and steadily, then she held out one hand to me. "Oh, how far, how very far away he had gone," she said, putting into words exactly what I have always felt when I look at the picture. I could not speak. I gazed at her in silence and felt as if my heart were slowly breaking in two. I had lost Charles, I had lost Monmouth, and she was going to them and I had to stay behind. What a working-day world this is, but what a great deal of waiting one has to do in it!

The next morning dawned diamond-clear and serene, one of our most beautiful English days of the early year, when the blood should dance and sparkle and one's feet hardly touch the ground, when spring says, "Behold I make all things new." That is the only way I can bear spring now—the thought of things made new, not of old things that can never be re-made. If we could have again in this life all we once found the best in it, so much would have to be altered, to be changed, to be obliterated, forgiven, forgotten, before we could get back to the moment when our happiness reached its zenith. Now, in Heaven, as I hope, there will be none of that! We shall just begin again where we left off at our happiest and best, and go on and on, higher and higher, to life and lives more great, more beautiful, more fine, always with Love perfect and undying.

Why, the Heaven I sometimes dream of is too good to be true!

So if, when I get there, if ever I get there, and it falls below my dreams, I shall be utterly happy, knowing that what I picture to myself is beyond all I can possibly desire or deserve. Yet God has told us that Paradise (like His Peace) will pass all under-

standing. What a wonderful thing to be able to do! —to have a Heaven to give to poor human beings who have just had a chance to guess at what beauty and laughter and loyalty and love may mean, who have had their Pisgah-sight, their dream of Paradise, and, because of that, can go cheerfully to death as went these brave if sorry sinners of whom I write, who paid and paid and paid a terrible price, and, I hope, now owe God nothing further.

I was bidden to Lady Wentworth's room early. She lay in the great green velvet bed with its towering ostrich plumes, her fair hair—that hair 'like the wheat'—spread over the pillows, smiling the same confident smile, as I came in. I kissed her and I moved to the picture, upon which fell the brilliant radiance of the morning. Looking for one moment, I turned quickly to her. "Henrietta," I said (I do not remember ever having called her by her name before), "he sent me something by Madame Carey, a curl of his hair and one of the King his father's—that was his last thought for me." I put my hand to my neck, where the packet rested securely under my gown.

"How good of him!" she said; "but not too good for you. And you come bringing me this? Ah, it is not for long; a little while, and this picture shall be yours again. I have had it labelled already that it is to be returned to you. And now *I* have something; Madame Stuart, will you give me that little box?"

She tried to raise herself on an elbow and fell back, but a tiny gold casket I remembered well was on her table, and I put it into her hands in a moment.

"Open it," she gasped. I did so, and out fell upon the velvet quilt a round glistening grey bead. I took it up and looked at it, and then I saw.

It was one of my black pearls.

"The last," she whispered, "the very last! I sold the necklace—you bade me—but before I came back to England I sent for the jeweller and I bought back this, all he had left. But—so that you may see I remembered—there is just one of your beautiful pearls, and I want you to keep it in memory of the others."

Not of herself, nor of Monmouth, just in memory of the rest. I went to the window and looked out across the fair park, so gay, so green, so unheeding in the dawning spring. "Oh, *don't!*" said my heart, but my lips were silent. I had been empowered to bear bravely the deaths of Charles and James, but this death was breaking down the last reserves of my self-control, this *happy* death! Henrietta Wentworth lay back on her pillows and smiled tenderly at me.

So that is how my one pearl came back, and that is how the portrait of the Duke of Monmouth lying dead was returned to me at the end of the following April.

I have no chick nor child to leave it to; I did dare to ask her if her son should not have it, but she quickly shook her head. The other men and women who loved Monmouth have their portraits of him. I would a Stuart sat upon the throne that I might return it to a Stuart's keeping. But Nature has decreed an end of us; we are to rule no more in England. Yet some day, I know, I know, the Hanoverian dross will burn out, there will be kings of England who will value their Stuart blood, and who will be loved and served by their people as Stuarts should be. Perhaps, too, they will find my picture and place it in a national collection, and the world will see as I saw, and begin to understand, the portrait of my poor Stuart who was never a Stuart, my King who was never a King!

So, now that I can write in this life, I will add one word—this is what has happened. They found my picture and they hung it in the National Portrait Gallery[1] only a few years back, and I, all unknowing, went there not long after. And across the room, warm in the mellow afternoon light, I caught sight of the portrait. I pulled up in my saunterings, I went up to it, and looked, and at that moment, for the first time, my eyes were opened, and something began to come back to me. On that afternoon there dawned the first glimmerings of returning memory, as consciousness comes slowly back to the sleeper. It has taken a long time; maybe I am not awake, but only dreaming after all. Then I trust I may not wake—it is a good dream! God knows I loved these people.

When she sped me on my way home that afternoon, Henrietta Wentworth did break down a little.

"Oh, these are not tears for myself," she said. "They are for you, my best friend. I know what waiting means. Always remember that when you think of me. And think of me sometimes—sometimes, Madame. I loved you too!"

So I have obeyed her, and I think of her death not as the end, but the beginning of the "making new" of her all-absorbing, all-sacrificing love for Monmouth, with, one may trust, the evil burnt out of it and but the good remaining. There are those who can realise nothing but the sin of all this story; all the qualities I have tried to tell of go for nothing—the unswerving loyalty, the unfaltering devotion, the cheerfulness in the face of disaster, the bravery in

[1] At the moment of writing, alas! not accessible to the public, but "placed in safety for fear of enemy aircraft."

the face of death—yes, and of life—the service, the giving, the pain endured, the loss endured, the death-in-life loneliness—why, if they go for nothing, then (I say it deliberately) the sin may go for nothing too, now that at last you are free, Henrietta, my dear, my dear.

She never changed, nor did he.

He wrecked his reputation for ever in the eyes of History by that terrible breakdown of self-control after he was taken prisoner—for her sake, and in vain. But he died with absolute calm and cheerfulness, thinking only of her, and thus, nine months later, she died thinking only of him.

Everything else had gone.

The furnace of agony had burnt away all other emotions, affections, and beliefs, but their trust in each other and in the God to Whom they had always prayed, and from Whom they believed they had had no sign of disapproval. The danger in their example would be great were such love as theirs common. It is not; once or twice only in a lifetime one meets with such love. I never deny their sin; I always knew they were wicked, even if they did not! But when the riddle of our lives is made plain to us in another world, then, and not till then, we shall understand why that love came to Henrietta Wentworth and never went away again, why, when once Monmouth loved her, he clave to her only, gave up his old careless loose life, found his religion a real thing, and died sure of God's mercy. In this world some of us are apparently set a task which appears to entail a breaking of our laws. It is not for me to attempt to say whether we should accept such a task or refuse it. We are lucky when we have only a small part to play that can be played circumspectly. But oh, how small, how very small, may be the task that is ours!—that was mine. Yet I envy Hen-

rietta nothing, and neither will I cast a stone at her.

Before such love I am silent in unspeakable admiration, for I could never have loved a man like that —I was not great enough.

I think of the last time I saw Toddington Place,[1] my walk beside her litter that glorious morning. We went along the great woods and by the steel-blue water; we passed through the beautiful neglected old gardens and paused for a while under the oak where Monmouth had carved her initials. And by our side all the way went the ghost of a gallant figure—tall, gay, light of foot, with dear brown eyes that shone, and a voice that would wile a bird from a tree—and she and I were both conscious of his company and each knew that the other knew. The sunlight trembled through the bare boughs, the splendid half-ruinous old house stood up bravely beyond its overgrown pleasure-grounds, the keen, clear English air blew in our faces over the short-bitten winter grass. A fragile hand, translucent as fine alabaster, was stretched forth and slipped into mine, the brave tawny eyes looked to me, happily, and all round, coming back in the end to turn to that figure that still stood beside us, smiling at her—always, always at her.

Thus, when I left her, I did not leave her alone.

So at the end of April was severed my last link with my James, and Bruce and I, neither of us bidden to the funeral, stood side by side in the windy churchyard on Toddington Hill while the villagers carried Henrietta Wentworth's body on its last journey, and her fearless soul went forth from the

[1] It was called "Place" in the seventeenth century.

dark prison of this world into the open light beyond. This I know, when I feel most sure; this I hope, when I come nearest to doubt; thus, in my blackest hour, I face and fight despair. For my life is a long one, and there is too much time in it.

No bells tolled. Sir William Smith, Philadelphia's old lover, had cut the ropes in a fit of virtuous indignation. Well, no bells tolled for Monmouth when they buried him! Otherwise there was much ceremony. Philadelphia had called together many of her friends; later she left a will and instructions for a magnificent memorial, to be erected above the vault where her daughter lies between Philadelphia's own coffin and that of her long-dead father; before which, in this life, I have knelt and prayed, not for the sleep of Henrietta's soul, but for its glad awaking. When the ceremony was over, Bruce and I, who had kept apart and spoken to no one, met again at the gate of the church; he put me into my hired coach previous to his own return to his home in the other direction, and for one moment, at the door, he took my hands.

Bruce was happily married, his long-life was filled with interest and much to do, his descendant by his second marriage was that ill-fated Louise of Stolberg, tragic little wife of tragedy incarnate, Prince Charles Edward in his old age; the posterity of this kind friend of mine were numerous and of importance among the great families, and there is much to be read in the old man's Memoirs written half a century later. But, for that day, he was just Monmouth's unchanged and unchanging friend, Henrietta Wentworth's first suitor and adoring lover; and though I smiled, for I was thinking of them both, and I was glad, I have not seen a sadder look on any man's face. He did not speak, he took both my hands and held them; then he kissed them, hard—oh, the wrench of the heart it gave me

for a second, for it reminded me so of Monmouth!—then suddenly he clasped them together and laid them on my lap. "Pray for them, Madame," he said, and stepped back.

My coach moved forward, rolled heavily down the long hill and out, through Dunstable, into the straight road that ran like an arrow to my home. That road runs beyond St. Stephen's, up to London, through London, and down, down to the south and the sea. I thought of the canal in Holland which had carried me straight, straight, on my way to see Monmouth alive for the last time, and of my life, that ran through all these other lives and deaths, right on, unturning. I thought of Frances Richmond and her warning: "The Stuarts go on"; and my answer: "I know; I go on myself!" It is quite true; I go on still. So I drove back along the Watling Street, with my hands clasped in my lap and a smile on my lips, alone.

THE END

TO THE STUARTS

You gave me of your blood. Not once it called me,
But ever, night and day.
It was no passing sentiment enthralled me,
And bade me come away.
You called, I heard. Two hundred years and over
Opened to let me through,—
"We are your people, why are you a rover."
And so I came to you.

My people—mine. I know your shame and sinning,
I know your joy and pain,
The blackest ending to the white beginning,
Ris'n stars—that set again.
I know your broken faith (and what comes after,)
The love you deem your due!
I know your tears, and oh, I know your laughter,
Since I am one of you.

I build no temple, raise no fane immortal,
I worship at no shrine,
I hold the key to ope a secret portal,
Between your days and mine,
A little door!—to other eyes 'tis hidden,
And I alone slip through
Into the past from whence I came, unchidden,
Back to the life with you!

Look, I am yours. And ours the past of glory,
That lives from age to age,
Writ ever in the Book of Scotland's Story,
Our deathless heritage.
I build no temple, raise no fane immortal,
I worship at no shrine,
But bring my whole heart through the little portal
To you, my people—mine!

MAUD NEPEAN.

1911.

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